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TITLE CONTEST STORY

? — *Guy de Maupassant* — 3

DETECTIVE STORIES

THE MYSTERY OF THE FIVE MONEY ORDERS — *T. S. Stribling* — 9

MURDER AT ELEVEN — *A. A. Milne* — 24

THE SWAMI OF NORTHBANK — *Lawrence G. Blochman* — 35

THE SUPERFLUOUS CLUES — *H. C. Bailey* — 48

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE SCILLIES — *Julian Symons* — 76

THE NEAT MAN — *Michael Gilbert* — 90

EQMM "SPECIAL"

A PIECE OF LIFE — *Jack London* — 102

EQMM "FIRST"

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT DIE — *Raphael Hayes* — 65

CRIME STORIES

ASHES — *Julia Peterkin* — 81

THE ROMAN CANDLES — *John Bell Clayton* — 99

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

THE LAST BUS HOME — *Cornell Woolrich* — 116

DETECTIVE DIRECTORY — *Robert P. Mills* — 142

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PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* — EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 23, No. 124, MARCH 1954. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

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Guy de Maupassant was a pupil of Gustave Flaubert, and some critics believe that he represents the classic example of a pupil ultimately outshining the master. In his early years de Maupassant looked and acted more like a professional athlete than like a litterateur. But after seven years of strict tutelage under Flaubert, de Maupassant burst into flower as a polished writer. His first published short story, "Boule de Suif," was immediately acclaimed, and is still considered, a masterpiece. Today de Maupassant is acknowledged a consummate and incomparable artist — although in the very beginning even Flaubert had not been impressed, nor had any of the great literary figures who attended Flaubert's famous soirees — Turgenev, Daudet, Zola. De Maupassant was an extraordinarily impressionable observer, who wrote in a strong, simple style, always preferring the humble word if it was le mot juste. The untitled story which follows is not like the author's "The Horla," with its hallucinations and horror of death; it is one of de Maupassant's more realistic character studies — of peasants, tradespeople, scoundrels, financiers, and frivolous men and women — which de Maupassant wrote with alternating pity and cruelty.

What title would you give to this story? If your title is judged the best, you can win $100. *See pages 5 and 6.*

?

by GUY DE MAUPASSANT

THE DEFENDANTS, Césaire-Isidore Brument and Prosper Napoléon Cornu, appeared before the Court of Assizes of the Seine-Inférieure on a charge of attempted murder, by drowning, of Madame Brument, lawful wife of the first of the aforenamed.

The two prisoners sat side by side on the traditional bench. They were two peasants; the first was small and stout, with short arms, short legs, and a round head, with a red, pimply face, planted directly on his trunk, which was also round and short, and with apparently no neck. He was a raiser of pigs, and lived at Cacheville-la-Goupil, in the Canton of Criquetot.

Prosper-Napoléon Cornu was thin, of medium height, with enormously long arms. His head was on crooked, his jaw awry, and he squinted. A blue blouse, as long as a shirt, hung down to his knees, and his yellow hair, which was scanty and plastered down on his head, gave his face a worn-out dirty look, a ruined look that was frightful. He had been nick-

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named "the curé," because he could imitate to perfection the chanting in church and even the sound of the serpent. This talent attracted to his café — for he was a saloon-keeper at Criquetot — a great many customers who preferred the "mass at Cornu" to the mass in church.

Madame Brument, seated on the witness bench, was a thin peasant woman, who seemed to be always asleep. She sat there motionless, her hands crossed on her knees, gazing fixedly before her with a stupid expression.

The Judge continued his interrogation:

"Well, then, Madame Brument, they came into your house and threw you into a barrel full of water. Tell us the details. Stand up."

She rose. She looked as tall as a flagpole, with her cap, which appeared like a white skull cap. She said, in a drawling tone:

"I was shelling beans. Just then they came in. I said to myself: 'What is the matter with them? They do not seem natural; they seem up to some mischief.' They watched me sideways, like this, especially Cornu, because he squints. I do not like to see them together, for they are two good-for-nothings when they are in company. I said: 'What do you want with me?' They did not answer. I had a sort of mistrust ——"

The defendant Brument interrupted the witness hastily, saying: "I was full."

Then Cornu, turning toward his accomplice, said, in the deep tones of an organ:

"Say that we were both full, and you will be telling no lie."

The Judge, severely: "You mean by that you were both drunk?"

Brument: "There can be no question about it."

Cornu: "That might happen to anyone."

The Judge, to the victim: "Continue your testimony, woman Brument."

"Well, Brument said to me, 'Do you wish to earn a hundred sous?' 'Yes,' I replied, 'seeing that a hundred sous are not picked up in a horse's tracks.' Then he said: 'Open your eyes and do as I do,' and he went to fetch the large empty barrel which is under the rain pipe in the corner, and he turned it over and brought it into my kitchen, and stuck it down in the middle of the floor, and then he said to me: 'Go and fetch water until it is full.'

"So I went to the pond with two pails and carried water, and still more water for an hour, seeing that the barrel was as large as a vat, saving your presence, Monsieur le Président.

"All this time Brument and Cornu were drinking a glass, and then another glass, and then another. They were finishing their drinks when I said to them: 'You are full, fuller than this barrel.' And Brument answered me: 'Do not worry; go on with your work; your turn will come; each one has his share.' I paid no attention to what he said, as he was full.

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"When the barrel was full to the brim, I said: 'There, that's done.'

"And then Cornu gave me a hundred sous. Not Brument, Cornu; it was Cornu gave them to me. And Brument said: 'Do you wish to earn a hundred sous more?' 'Yes,' I said, for I am not accustomed to presents like that. Then he said: 'Take off your clothes.'

" 'Take off my clothes?'

" 'Yes,' he said.

" 'How many shall I take off?'

" 'If it worries you at all, keep on your chemise, that won't bother us.'

"A hundred sous, that is a hundred sous, and I have to undress myself, but I did not fancy undressing before those two good-for-nothings. I took off my cap, and then my jacket, and then my skirt, and then my sabots. Brument said: 'Keep on your stockings, also; we are good fellows.'

"And Cornu said, too: 'We are good fellows.'

"So there I was, almost like Mother Eve. And they got up from their chairs, but could not stand straight, they were so full, saving your presence, Monsieur le Président.

"I said to myself: 'What are they up to?'

"And Brument said: 'Are you ready?'

"And Cornu said: 'I'm ready!'

"And then they took me, Brument by the head and Cornu by the feet, as one might take, for instance, a sheet that has been washed. Then I began to bawl.

"And Brument said: 'Keep still, wretched creature.'

"And they lifted me up in the air and put me into the barrel which was full of water, so that I had a check of the circulation, a chill to my insides.

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"And Brument said: 'Is that all?'

"Cornu said: 'That is all.'

"Brument said: 'The head is not in; that will make a difference in the measure.'

"Cornu said: 'Put in her head.'

"And then Brument pushed down my head as if to drown me, so that I could already see Paradise. And he pushed it down, and I disappeared.

"And then he must have been frightened. He pulled me out and said: 'Go and get dry, carcass.'

"As for me, I took to my heels and ran as far as Monsieur le curé's. He lent me a skirt belonging to his servant, for I was almost in a state of nature, and he went to fetch Maître Chicot, the country watchman, who went to Criquetot to fetch the police, who came to my house with me.

"There we found Brument and Cornu fighting like two rams.

"Brument was bawling: 'It isn't true; I tell you that there is at least a cubic meter in it. It is the method that was no good.'

"Cornu bawled: 'Four pails, that is almost half a cubic meter. You need not reply, that's what it is.'

"The police captain put them both under arrest. I have no more to tell."

She sat down. The audience in the courtroom laughed. The jurors looked at one another in astonishment.

The judge said: "Defendant Cornu, you seem to have been the instigator of this infamous plot. What have you to say?"

And Cornu rose in his turn.

"Judge," he replied, "I was full."

The Judge answered gravely: "I know it. Proceed."

"I will. Well, Brument came to my place about 9 o'clock, and ordered two drinks, and said: 'Here's one for

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you, Cornu.' I sat down opposite him and drank, and, out of politeness, I offered him a glass. Then he returned the compliment and so did I, and so it went on from glass to glass until noon, when we were full.

"Then Brument began to cry. That touched me. I asked him what was the matter. He said: 'I must have 1000 francs by Thursday.' That cooled me off a little, you understand. Then he said to me all at once: 'I will sell you my wife.'

"I was full, and I was a widower. You understand, that stirred me up. I did not know his wife, but she was a woman, wasn't she? I asked him: 'How much would you sell her for?'

"He reflected, or pretended to reflect. When one is full one is not very clear-headed, and he replied: 'I will sell her by the cubic meter.'

"That did not surprise me, for I was as drunk as he was, and I knew what a cubic meter is in my business. It is 1000 liters. That suited me.

"But the price remained to be settled. All depends on the quality. I said: 'How much do you want a cubic meter?'

"He answered: 'Two thousand francs.'

"I gave a bound like a rabbit, and then I reflected that a woman ought not to measure more than 300 liters, so I said: 'That's too dear.'

"He answered: 'I cannot do it for less. I should lose by it.'

"You understand one is not a dealer in hogs for nothing. One understands one's business. But if he is smart, the seller of bacon, I am smarter, seeing that I sell them, also. Ha! ha! ha! So I said to him: 'If she were new I would not say anything, but she has been married to you for some time, so she is not as fresh as she was. I will give you 1500 francs a cubic meter, not a sou more. Will that suit you?'

"He answered: 'That's a bargain!'

"I agreed, and we started out, arm in arm. We must help each other in this world.

"But a fear came to me: 'How can you measure her unless you put her into the liquid?'

"Then he explained his idea, not without difficulty, for he was full. He said to me: 'I take a barrel and fill it with water to the brim. I put her in it. All the water that comes out we will measure; that is the way to fix it.'

"I said: 'I see, I understand. But this water that overflows will run away; how are you going to gather it up?'

"Then he began stuffing me, and explained to me that all we should have to do would be to refill the barrel with the water his wife had displaced as soon as she should have left. All the water we should pour *in* would be the measure. I supposed about ten pails; that would be a cubic meter. He isn't a fool, all the same, when he is drunk, that old horse.

"To be brief, we reached his house, and I took a look at its mistress. A beautiful woman she certainly was not. Anyone can see her, for there

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she is. I said to myself: 'I am disappointed, but never mind, she will be of value; handsome or ugly, it is all the same, is it not, Monsieur le Président?' And then I saw that she was as thin as a rail. I said to myself: 'She will not measure 400 liters.' I understand the matter, it being in liquids.

"She told you about the proceeding. I even let her keep on her chemise and stockings, to my own disadvantage.

"When that was done she ran away. I said: 'Look out, Brument! She is escaping.'

"He replied: 'Do not be afraid, I will catch her, all right. She will have to come back to sleep. I will measure the deficit.'

"We measured. Not four pailfuls. Ha! ha! ha!"

The witness began to laugh so persistently that a gendarme was obliged to punch him in the back. Having quieted down, he resumed speaking.

"In short, Brument exclaimed: 'Nothing doing; that is not enough.' I bawled and bawled, and bawled again, he punched me, I hit back. That would have kept on till the Day of Judgment, seeing we were both drunk.

"Then came the gendarmes. They swore at us, they took us off to prison. I want damages."

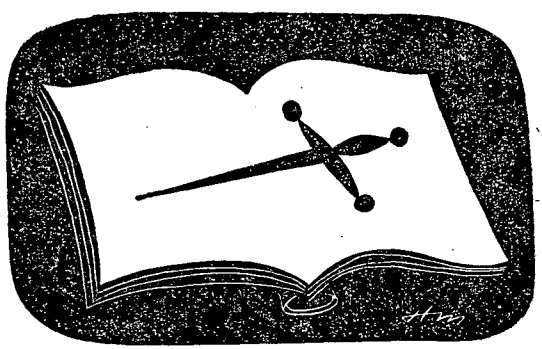
He sat down.

Brument confirmed in every particular the statements of his accomplice. The jury, in consternation, retired to deliberate.

At the end of an hour they returned a verdict of acquittal for the defendants, with some severe strictures on the dignity of marriage, and establishing the precise limitations of business transactions.

Brument went home to the domestic roof accompanied by his wife.

Cornu went back to his business.



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Poggioli investigates a crap-game killing in the deep, deep South

THE MYSTERY OF THE FIVE MONEY ORDERS

by T. S. STRIBLING

WHEN DEPUTY SHERIFF DAWSON Bobbs stopped by our croquet club to report another crap-game killing out on White Oak Creek, Mrs. Alma Lane called out to me: "There's another mystery for you and Professor Poggioli to solve!"

Any purist can imagine my revulsion at such a choice of words.

"Alma," I said, "the word 'mystery' means something more than a simple killing in a crap game; it holds overtones of the strange, the unaccountable, the unknown. . . ."

Here my friend Professor Poggioli interrupted to ask why I used the phrase "killing in a crap game?"

I said it was the ordinary expression anyone would use.

"Why don't you say *murder* in a crap game?" asked the psychologist.

"Really, I don't know. As a matter of fact, it doesn't seem to be exactly murder."

"Precisely," nodded Poggioli, "and it isn't murder at all: it's a killing, just as people say. The crap game takes exactly the same place in the South today as the dueling field did in the South of yesterday. Nobody called death on the field of honor a murder, nor do they do so at a crap game."

"So what?" I asked.

"It's simply this," pointed out Poggioli; "every crap-game killing is a mystery. It has a background of unknown antipathies, and one of them is strong enough to sentence one of the players to death."

Only then did I see what he was doing — helping Alma Lane in a perfectly silly argument.

"What they usually kill each other for," I said, "is using crooked dice, or switching dice."

"No, that is the formality just before the shooting," said Poggioli. "It represents the offer and acceptance of a challenge."

"I really think you-all ought to look into it," interrupted Mrs. Alma delightedly. "If it is a mystery . . ."

"How can it be a mystery, Alma, when you know who was killed, who did it, and all about the crime?"

"You don't know who was killed."

"I don't, but Mr. Bobbs does."

"Sure," agreed the Deputy Sheriff. "Bump Peters was killed by Jim Haddock."

Taylor Lane, Mrs. Alma's banker husband, interrupted sharply. "Jim Haddock!"

"That's right," said Mr. Bobbs.

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"Why, the bank lent Jim Haddock over four hundred dollars just last week," said Mr. Lane in a tone which meant that Jim Haddock had lost his right either to kill or be killed while owing the bank that much money.

"Yes, I knew that," said Deputy Sheriff Bobbs.

Taylor Lane had taken notice of the news of the murder, but he was really shocked at this new revelation. "You mean Jim Haddock went around telling everybody he had got money from the bank!"

"He was drunk," excused Mr. Bobbs.

"Men oughtn't to get drunk — they ought to stay sober about business."

Mr. Bobbs cleared his throat. "That's what I come up here to see you 'bout, Taylor."

"What about — Jim's getting drunk?"

"Mm — mm, partly that. You'll want him arrested, won't ye, before he gits away an' leaves the county? He shore won't ever come back."

"Yes . . . but of course it's for the good of the county as well as my bank."

"Shore, shore I know that. I was jest wonderin' if you'd mind lettin' me have yore car to go after him in."

"What's the matter with your car?"

"It ain't big enough."

"Big enough for what?"

"To carry the crowd I'm goin' to debbitize to he'p me."

"Crowd? Are you afraid of Jim Haddock?"

"Mm — mm, yes, some. He's jest back frum the army where he got a rating of expert rifleman. But what I was gittin' at was this: I'm goin' out on White Oak Creek with a big car an' debbitize all of Jim's cousins an' uncles to he'p me arrest Jim, an' at least that many of 'em will be shootin' for me instid of ag'inst me."

"Why don't you let Tump Pack drive you in his taxi?"

"Tump couldn't drive me out on White Oak. They don't allow no colored folk out on White Oak, you know that."

"Why . . . why, Dawson, I wouldn't want my car going out on a . . ."

"Oh, all right. Just thought I'd ast. No rale reason for me or anybody else to risk gittin' hurt over a little ole crap game killin'." And he turned away to go back to the business part of town where he could protect the more solid interests of his community.

Taylor Lane stopped him. "Dawson, how many men do you want to take?"

"Many as I kin git in yore car. I was doin' this mos'ly fer the bank. Usually I don't pay no attention to these little ol' crap shootin's."

"Well, all right then. As a good citizen . . . I'll go around and get my car. Now don't you get it shot up or get any blood on the upholstery, or the tires punctured."

As the bank president made his way to the garage, Mr. Bobbs called out warmly, "Taylor, I'll treat it better'n my own." When Taylor was

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gone, Mr. Bobbs cut a quid from a plug of tobacco, put it in his mouth, then looked at Poggioli and me. "Well, I was jest wonderin' whether you-uns would like to go along with me or not, sence both of you foller crime as a trade, in a way."

"No, we wouldn't," I said. "Professor Poggioli is interested only in unusual crimes — ones that require subtlety, insight . . ."

"Now that's exactly why I wanted him to go along with us on this here trip," nodded Mr. Bobbs, getting his tobacco shaped and settled in his mouth.

"What would require insight and subtlety in a . . ."

"Why, jest this," said the Deputy Sheriff seriously. "I'm goin' to haff to find out from his kinfolks jest what one of his kinfolks he's holed up with. They'll tell me all sorts of thaings. I figgered Mr. Poggioli, bein' a psychologist, could tell whether a man was lyin' or whether he was tellin' the truth. That's one of the main jobs the law has out on White Oak, decidin' which is which."

"I believe I can help you, Mr. Bobbs," said the criminologist.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Mr. Poggioli," said Mr. Bobbs, from around his quid, "it saves me the trouble of havin' to debbitize you."

A half hour later, when we entered the White Oak district, Mr. Bobbs began collecting a posse of Jim Haddock's own kinsmen, either to help him arrest the murderer or at least to confuse his purpose. He deputized young Ed Nickerson, a cousin, Harkney Scruggs, an uncle, and a number of other branches of a shady family tree. One man, Zack Poke, was a nonrelative, whom, Mr. Bobbs explained to me, he was "debbitizin' to make ever'thing not seem so plain an' open." It was an understandable motive in any public servant.

Zack Poke, when he came out to his fence and discovered what was wanted, gave an odd, embarrassed, sort of indrawn laugh, then said he was awfully sorry but he wasn't qualified to serve. Mr. Bobbs asked him why he wasn't qualified: was he yellow?

Zack drew in another laugh: "Naw, I ain't yaller zactly." His trouble was he was already prejudiced against Jim Haddock.

"Well, what you thaink that's got to do with it?" asked Mr. Bobbs.

"I dunno, but you kain't serve on a jury if you are prej'iced against the defendant."

"That may be," agreed Mr. Bobbs, "but in this case the more prej'iced you air the better it is for ever'body . . . the faster an' straighter you'll shoot."

All right then, Zack Poke reckoned he would go along.

Poggioli became interested in Poke, possibly because of his habitual snorts of completely mirthless laughter. The criminologist asked him if he had become prejudiced against Jim Haddock through some personal injury Jim had done him. Nothing like that. In a crap game, maybe? Oh, no, Poke didn't gamble. Then possibly some woman?

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— although the psychologist said he himself did not think this was the reason. The whole carful laughed at this, and Harkney Scruggs said Zack never went with a gal in all his life, and he guessed, never would.

"Then it must have been either through buying or selling?" persisted Poggioli.

"Sellin'," said Poke.

"Who sold whom?"

"Me sold him."

The psychologist paused in surprise. "That's very unusual — for a salesman to form a prejudice against the buyer. Didn't he pay you for it — whatever you sold him?"

"Oh, yes, he had to pay me."

"What did you sell him?"

"Five money orders."

Everybody, even Poggioli, joined Zack's laughter at the grotesque idea of a rural mail carrier forming a prejudice against a customer for buying five money orders.

"What were they for?"

"I don't know."

"Whom did they go to? Maybe I can tell you what they were for."

"That I kain't tell you; it's ag'inst postal rules an' regerlations to give out any information about the mail I han'l."

"I see." Poggioli sat looking at Zack, reflecting. The car whispered forward to the impending Battle of White Oak Creek. After a little while, Poggioli asked: "Didn't you sell Jim Haddock five money orders for four hundred and eighty-five dollars and twenty-five cents?"

Zack's blank face set us all laughing again — until we suddenly realized that Poggioli had apparently read Zack's mind clear down to the odd cents. Then we sobered at the thought that the psychologist could do the same thing to the rest of us, if he wanted to. Mr. Bobbs did not fail to point out to his law-enforcement squad how useful it would be, when they inquired of the Haddock kin where Jim Haddock was, to have a man along who could know a witness's thoughts no matter what the witness said.

Two or three voices spoke up mechanically. "Yes, that would be very good." Then the law enforcers became quiet again, glancing nervously at Poggioli and at each other.

Suddenly young Ed Nickerson exclaimed: "Hey, Dawson, stop! Right there to the left — behind them bushes!"

The car's brakes screeched — Mr. Bobbs did not want to run into a string of bullets that might put holes in the windshield and blood on the upholstery.

"What the heck are you yellin' about? What's to the left?"

"The place where Jim killed Bump!"

"For Pete's sake, I'm not tryin' to arrest the place! I'm tryin' to arrest Jim!"

"Yes, but don't you want to look at the place? A detective always looks at the scene of the crime, don't they? He wants to measure the footprints an' take samples of dirt, don't he?"

"What for?"

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"To identify the murderer!"

Mr. Bobbs had also read detective stories, but like most officers of the law he did not care for them.

"It don't make no diff'runce what kind of dirt Jim Haddock's got on him. When we git clost enough to fin' that out, the case will be over."

But young Mr. Nickerson insisted on dirt and tracks and chemical tests because he had never seen anything like that worked before, and here was a man who could work them. The other members of the posse had also visited movies in Lanesburg and had a natural curiosity to see a genuine detective in operation. There was no reason why they should be refused. Whatever relative Jim had holed up with would still be there when we arrived, so there was no hurry. Young Nickerson inquired if Poggioli wanted to examine the scene of the murder.

Poggioli said yes, he would look.

Mr. Dawson Bobbs asked blankly, "What you want to look at the place for, Mr. Poggioli?"

"Very simple," replied the psychologist. "I hope to clear up the little riddle that Mr. Poke, your mail carrier, has given us. I would like to find out to whom those money orders were sent."

The men climbed out, batting their eyes and thinking hard. Young Ed Nickerson, who had the sprightliest imagination, came up with an answer. He whispered to his fourth cousin, "Sim, *he* thinks maybe cousin Jim drapped a letter out of his pocket while he was shootin' craps." It was a long shot, but it was the only reasonable and logical thing Ed could think of.

Behind some bushes, a circle had been cleared in the leaves where the crap shooters had spread an old horse blanket. Poggioli kicked around the margin of this circle, finding an empty whiskey bottle, some dimes and nickels, and a single die with nothing but threes on all its six sides. No doubt it had a mate with nothing but fours, and the two thrown together had been good for a natural any time, any place. All the law enforcers clustered around this die, examining it and bitterly condemning its original owner. A general opinion formed that it had belonged to Bump Peters and had rolled out of his pocket as he lay on the ground. Harkney Scruggs said that this die looked to him "like Bump deserved to be shot," and the best thing they could all do was to get in the car and go back home.

Professor Poggioli interrupted, saying, "Four men in our posse were here at the killing. I want them to tell me exactly what they remember."

As the criminologist asked no particular person to describe the event, a certain constraint arose among the law enforcers. If they described the fight, they would admit their illegal presence at the crap game; if they remained silent, they were sure Poggioli would read their minds and get a true bill against them for the grand jury — that is, if he "had a mind to."

Somebody had to talk, so finally Harkney Scruggs swallowed, cleared

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his throat, and said, "Mr. Poggioli, this here is what I heared. Bump Peters was settin' here, an' Jim Haddock over there —"

"Which one of them accused the other of cheating before either drew a gun?" asked the psychologist.

"Bump accused Jim o' runnin' crooked dice, an' Jim pulled first an' shot. Bump toppled over right where you're stan'in now. He tried to git up an' draw, but fell back down. Cousin Jim turned an' walked off. I leant down an' said, 'Bump, kin I do anythaing fer ye?' an' he said, 'I reckon not, Hark. I guess I had it comin' to me.' 'Nen he died."

Poggioli deliberated on the tragedy Harkney Scruggs had described. He turned to the rural mail carrier. "Mr. Poke," he said, "Jim Haddock sent the five money orders to a woman, didn't he?"

Zack gave an indrawn snort of complete surprise. "Why . . . uh . . ."

"And the money orders went to San Francisco, didn't they?"

Zack collected himself sufficiently to avoid one question by asking another. "What makes you thaink so?"

"Because four hundred and eighty-five dollars and twenty-five cents is too much to pay for a single air passage from California here, and it is too little to pay from Japan. It must be two persons — a full fare and a half fare — coming here from California."

Zack Poke continued to avoid answering questions by asking them. "What made you thaink all that stan'in here, Mr. Poggioli?"

"Because Bump's last words were, 'I guess I had it coming to me.' So the trouble must have been over Jim Haddock's wife — if Bump had it coming to him."

The circle of law enforcers stood around in amazement — incredulous that so much information could be spun out of so little to start with.

"Zack, you ain't answered Mr. Poggioli's question," pointed out Sim Langford.

"That's right . . . I ain't," and the mailman snorted.

"Zack, just answer me this," pursued Poggioli. "Why should you feel a prejudice against Haddock for sending money to bring home his wife and child? What is wrong in that?"

The mail carrier spread his long hands. "I ain't sayin' nothin' atall. Hit's agin' the postal laws an' regerlations, so you kin thaink anythaing you want to — but I ain't sayin' nothin'."

A chorus arose against such pernicketiness. Deputy Sheriff Bobbs broke out angrily: "What do you thaink would happen to you if you broke one little ole rule an' regerlation an' tole who Jim Haddock sent them money orders to?"

Zack Poke didn't laugh. "I tell you what 'ud happen to me. One of you crap shooters would report me to Washington early in the mornin' to git my job, that's what 'ud happen!"

The kinsmen of Jim Haddock moved toward Zack and something might have happened if Mr. Bobbs had not intervened.

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"Wait a minute, fellers! Lemme ast Mr. Poggioli how much depen's on Zack's information before you-all jump on him. How much does, Mr. Poggioli?"

"It's simply to clear up a contradiction," explained the criminologist. "Zack says he is prejudiced against Haddock for sending money orders to Jim's wife and child. But what Haddock did was a praiseworthy act. I would like Zack's feelings rationalized before we begin firing at the fugitive."

Mr. Bobbs was utterly confounded. "Of all the fool thaings! What diffrunce does it make about the daingfool money orders? We got to fin' him an' arrest him — or kill him. Come on, ever'body, I told you-all they wasn't no sense in lookin' at the scene of the crime. Come ahead an' le's fin' Jim Haddock!"

The banker's car once more sped on its way and presently came to the cabin of old Miss Fannie Moser, the first cousin of a greataunt of Jim Haddock's. It could easily be that old Miss Fannie had lent her kinsman aid and comfort. The car stopped out of rifle range of the cabin and Ed Nickerson, a faroff nephew of old Miss Moser, approached on foot. The rest of us in the car could hear him shouting.

"Hello! Hello, Aunt Fannie! Call off yo dawgs, Aunt Fannie!"

A high thin voice answered, but we couldn't make out the words.

"I ain't got time to come in, Aunt Fannie. I come to ast you have you heared anything about where cousin Jim Haddock is?"

The dogs quieted and a faint reply came. "Ain't that a car full o' men down the road, Ed?"

"Yes, it is, Aunt Fannie."

"How come a whole car full o' men atter cousin Jim?"

Ed cleared his throat. "Well, you know, Aunt Fannie, Jim killed Bump Peters in a crap game last Sunday night —"

"So that's the law comin' to arrest Cousin Jim?"

"Listen, Aunt Fannie, we've got a fine detective in that car an' we put him on Bump's trail — Bump's, mind you — an' he has jest about proved already that Bump was foolin' with cousin Jim's wife an' was due to git killed an' the law kain't tech him for that."

"I didn't know cousin Jim had a wife."

"Yeh, he's got a wife an' chile. Us men in the car are tryin' to fin' cousin Jim an' he'p him in his defense."

"I seen some guns down there shinin'."

"Well, Aunt Fannie, if you set out to he'p yore cousin when he's in trouble, you nachelly carry yo gun."

"Mm — huh . . . Well, Jim ain't hyar, he's on down the line somewhar."

"Toward Lanesburg?"

"Yeh, toward Lanesburg, but you haven't fooled me any, Ed Nickerson, you're jest the same kind of a boy yore daddy is a man."

"Anyway, thank ye for tellin' us which dorection cousin Jim is, Aunt Fannie."

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"You're welcome, I'm shore."

When Ed Nickerson returned to the car, the law enforcers found themselves in a quandary. What was Aunt Fannie trying to do? — send them toward Jim or keep them away from him or lead them straight into Jim's line of fire. Previous expeditions of the law into White Oak Creek had often ended disastrously. Finally the matter was left to Poggioli, as a psychological expert, and he ruled that Miss Fannie Moser had been sincere — up to a point. The car moved cautiously on toward Lanesburg.

They were traveling past old Bill Naylor's place when suddenly the unpainted door in the unpainted log house flew open and someone came hurrying out. All the guns in the car jerked into line with the figure, which turned out to be not Jim Haddock but old man Bill Naylor himself. He was in a hurry because he didn't believe he could reach the road in time to stop the car. He waved his arms and shouted at us.

"Air you-all the law? Cousin Fannie Moser tol' me the law was after Jim Haddock."

"Yes, we are," conceded Mr. Bobbs, who had found it was not wise to attempt to deceive the users of the White Oak party line. "What do you want with us?"

"Hol' on jest a minute. Jim Haddock wants to know is Mr. Henry Poggioli in there with you-uns?"

Mr. Bobbs put on more speed since he was now obviously under the eye of Jim Haddock. The old man yelled desperately, "Hold on! Hold on thar!"

When the Deputy Sheriff had maneuvered the car behind the Naylor barn and out of the line of fire, he came to a stop.

"Yes, he's with us. What does Jim Haddock want to know fer?"

The old man turned and went hobbling back. "Much obliged. That's all I wanted to know."

"Hey there, ain't Jim in yore house?"

"No-o!"

"Was you talkin' to him over the phone?"

"Yes."

"Well, where is he at now?"

"I dunno. You kain't tell whar a man is by his talkin' on the phone." And the old man disappeared inside, evidently hurrying back to the telephone.

Naylor's jack-in-the-box appearance cast a new and discomforting light over the situation. Ed Nickerson believed that Jim Haddock had heard of Poggioli's fame as a detective and meant to pick him off when the car came within range, leaving our expedition without a head. Others thought Jim was really trying to get us to move on toward Lanesburg, while he made his getaway in the opposite direction. All of us felt somewhat safer than before, but by the same token, more frustrated. However, we decided to move on toward town — after all, we couldn't move in two directions at the same time.

The next farmhouse was dangerous. It belonged to old Jeff Woods. Jeff was

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no kin to the Haddocks but he owed a great debt of gratitude to the family. He had run off and left his first wife years before, over on Moccasin Creek, and had then come over to White Oak where, being a married man, he could not marry Jim's Aunt Sally Haddock; so he had just settled down with her on a farm and the two had lived very happily ever since. That was why old man Jeff was so partial to the Haddocks. So, naturally, Jeff and his nephew could be holed up together, prepared to fight to the death.

Forewarned by these family connections, the posse got out, deployed, and approached the Woods' cabin by gully, rail fences, and a weed-grown garden. Poggioli and I took cover behind a cowshed. In the midst of this campaign a woman's voice called from the cabin — no doubt, the very Sally Haddock of romantic repute — saying that they had seen us and had been expecting us and Jim wanted Mr. Poggioli to come in and talk to him before anybody made a move — "to understan' his side an' see that he was done jestice by."

Mr. Bobbs made a careful circuit and joined Poggioli and me behind the cowshed. He wanted to know what Poggioli thought of Jim's request — the Deputy Sheriff had never before heard of a White Oak man wanting to talk to the law. I suggested that Jim had been away in the army and had learned the usages of war.

Mr. Bobbs picked up my term "usage." "That's jes' what he's done! He wants Mr. Poggioli to show hisse'f in the open, an' then he'll shoot him down an' we'll be without our wheel hoss!"

Poggioli shook his head. "No, Haddock has a defense — he is going to appeal to the unwritten law. I believe that will clear him in the courts. You see, Bump Peters's dying statement that he 'had it coming to him' is evidence in that direction. Only one thing holds me back." Mr. Bobbs asked what was that. "Zack Poke's condemnation of Haddock for sending the money orders. If he had good grounds to condemn Jim, then this could be a ruse to put me out of the way."

"Well, they ain't no way of gittin' nothin' out of Zack. He'd see ever' man in our car shot dead before he'd vi'late a post office regerlation an' resk losin' his job."

Poggioli pondered. "Well, it's up to me to decide which I'll believe — Zack's disapproval or Bump Peters's dying statement. According to law, a man's last statement is the better evidence, so . . . I'm going in and see what Mr. Haddock wants to tell me." And with that, Poggioli walked to the house.

Mr. Bobbs and I held our breath. He got to the door alive, the shutter opened a small way, and he disappeared inside.

We waited what seemed an endless interval. Mr. Bobbs took an optimistic view of the situation. He would moisten his lips and say, "Well, I've got along without Mr.

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Poggioli all my life an' I reckon I can do it ag'in. But he shore was a handy man to have aroun' to ketch up with a liar." Then he would say, "Jim has cut Mr. Poggioli's throat an' is now waitin' tull plumb dark before tryin' to make his git-away."

I could not help wondering why Poggioli lingered so long if he were still alive. I thought to myself: what an ironic thing it would be if Professor Henry Poggioli, of world fame, came to an end like this. When I was just about to decide that was what had happened, the door inched open again and the psychologist reappeared. Everybody was enormously relieved.

Mr. Bobbs called out to know what Jim had said.

"He's going to give himself up," called back Poggioli in a sympathetic voice. "He's going to plead the unwritten law, just as I thought he would."

Shouts of approval greeted this, and Poggioli went on: "You married men ought to know how he feels." And one of the men coming out of a gully said, "Yes, an' us unmarried men know how Bump Peters feels." Loud laughter rang out all over the place.

Then arose a legal discussion as to whether Jim would be tried by the army or the civil courts, and whether the unwritten law would hold in a court-martial. In the midst of this debate Mr. Bobbs exclaimed, "If Jim Haddock is goin' to give hisse'f up, why don't he come on out an' do it?"

Poggioli explained. "Oh, he's not in there. I talked to him over the telephone. He said he would meet us in Lanesburg."

Whoops of relief came from Jim's cousins and uncles.

Deputy Sheriff Bobbs was almost beside himself. "Of all the empty-headed fools! Lettin' Jim Haddock hol' us hyar tull dark! Now he's tuk to the hills and the Lord knows we'll never see hair nor hide of him ag'in!"

Poggioli didn't agree with Mr. Bobbs. Haddock sounded to the criminologist as if he were telling the truth.

"I don't kerr a heck what he sounded like, he's gone! What was he stan'in' there talkin' to you so long fer if it wasn't fer that?"

"He was telling me he had sent money to get his wife and baby here, and would it be safe for him to show them to a jury, or would it be better if he hired the Honorable H. Hall Hicks to show them to a jury and plead his case."

"What did you tell him?" asked young Nickerson.

"I told him he'd better hire the lawyer."

"That's right," approved Hark. "A jury don't feel no pity fer a womern an' her childern, onless somebody hars a lawyer to tell how pitiful she is."

"Come on an' le's go home," ordered Mr. Bobbs. "Stan'in' here, lettin' that lyin' Jim Haddock hol' us here tull dark!"

There arose endless debate on the trip into town — would or would not Jim meet us in Lanesburg? On one

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side was the great psychological authority of Professor Henry Poggioli; on the other side, Jim Haddock's county-wide reputation for continuous and imaginative misstatement of facts. It was a toss-up; both men were giants in their lines.

When the law enforcement party arrived in Lanesburg, they found a big canasta game under way in Taylor Lane's home. The play broke up as soon as we reached the street light in front of the Lane gate. Jim Stevens, the auctioneer, who was one of the players, shouted out to ask if we had caught Haddock. Ed Nickerson called back, "Naw, ain't he showed up hyar yit?"

This question caused great astonishment among the card players which in turn led to a long explanation and another debate as to whether or not Haddock would "show up." The crowd was divided about evenly: the two women, Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. Lane, believed with Poggioli that Haddock would eventually appear; Zack Poke, the rural mail carrier, contended he would not because, as Zack explained, Jim "has no grounds to come in on."

The whole day's doings had to be repeated and amplified for the benefit of the canasta players, and when they discovered that Zack Poke was the only man who really knew the secret of Haddock's murder of Bump Peters, the outcry against the postal employee was renewed. Banker Taylor Lane gave it style and dignity. He asked Zack if he would allow a mere postal regulation to stand in the way of justice. He then insinuated that if Zack withheld information that would lead to Jim Haddock's arrest, he, Zack, would become morally responsible for Haddock's debt to the bank.

Mrs. Alma Lane always took an interest in her husband's business and she told Zack that the bank would sue him for conspiracy if he didn't tell all he knew about Jim Haddock. At this point the telephone interrupted Mrs. Lane's expression of opinion, and she rushed inside.

Mrs. Helen Stevens, the auctioneer's wife, was a Northern woman, and she believed Haddock would keep his word, come in, and give himself up as he had promised. She had logic on her side: Haddock was named "Jim" — the same as her husband, Jim Stevens.

So the discussion on the Lane porch wound into subtleties one would hardly have expected in so simple a case. The cousins and uncles of the Haddock clan looked at their watches because it was now after dark and getting very late for them to be out of bed. They figured if Jim was coming he would be there by now, and besides how were they going to get back to White Oak Creek? — walk? None of the townsmen would want to take them back and the countrymen thought that they should; so there arose between the two groups of law enforcers a bitter but completely silent struggle, while their talk continued about Jim Haddock.

In the midst of this mental tug-of-

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war Mrs. Alma Lane came flying out the door, onto the porch, crying, "Get in the car ever'body! Quick! He's come! He's at the lock-up, and he says if Dawson Bobbs doesn't show up in three minutes, he's going to leave and nobody'll ever see him again!"

Everybody rushed out to the car, piled in, and consumed a trifle less than three minutes getting to the lock-up.

Jim Haddock and Heber Tinnon, the jailer, were waiting at the lock-up for Mr. Bobbs to arrive with his papers. The jailer was sleepy but he was a perfectionist, and no man could get into his lock-up without the proper credentials, although a number had got out with little red tape to help them.

"Where was you-all?" asked Jim Haddock in the voice of a man whose trust had been betrayed. "Heb there has been phonin' all over the place for ye."

Taylor Lane answered in excellent spirits. "They were up at my house, Jim. They brought my car back home."

"Well, didn't you-all know when I come in I'd give myse'f up at the guardhouse — I mean, lock-up?" The law enforcers said they were sorry they had not met him at the correct place. "That's all right, it's gittin' late" — Jim yawned — "but I don't mind that if you-all don't. Mr. Poggioli, now, told me over the telephone that he would explain my case to you-uns an' I'd git off on a light bond, or be released on my own reconnoitre, or maybe jest be turned loose an' let the grand jury bring in a bill ag'inst me if they wanted to. Now, Mr. Poggioli, you go 'head an' tell 'em."

Everyone was impressed favorably with Haddock. His attitude toward his murder of Bump Peters was straightforward and wholesome. He gained the sympathy of his hearers before his counsel had even said a word. Poggioli was a psychologist, but he had been advisory counsel in one criminal case in Lanesburg, and now he copied the winding legal style as best he could:

"What is your name?"

"Jim Haddock."

"Have you recently been in service in Korea?"

"Yes."

"Were you married over there?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"A woman named Kissuyah."

"Did you have a child by her?"

"Yes — Jimmu."

There was quite a sensation among the ladies at the news that Kissuyah had a child. They seemed, retroactively, not to have expected it.

"Will you describe your life with Kissuyah up until the time you took Bump Peters over to see her and the baby?"

"Yes, I will. I lived in camp, of course, but I went over to see her when I could git a pass, an' she come to see me when she or her old folks needed anything. Well, after Bump seen her, he jest simply took

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my place with Kissuyah an' little Jimmu an' turned me out. I didn't git to go to see her no more."

Such a colossal wrong, told in such a dry legal manner, shocked us all. Even Mr. Bobbs looked at the warrant in his hands, which he had not yet served, and considered tearing it up.

"Well," said Taylor Lane, "I, for one, don't see any use holding Jim in jail. If this ever comes up before the grand jury they're sure to throw the case out. They never will get out a true bill against Jim. So why keep him here?"

"Ort we to phone Square Smith an' ast him to set a date fer Jim's trile here?" asked Mr. Bobbs.

"Can if you want to," said Taylor Lane. "Just be a formality under the unwritten law."

"I'm not much of a man for legal formalities," said Mr. Bobbs. "I b'lieve in doin' right."

Poggioli again took over control of the situation. He continued his cross-examination.

"And you also state, Mr. Haddock, that in the affray at the crap game last Sunday night you shot Bump Peters in self-defense?"

"That's correct, sir."

"Did Bump attack you?"

"He cussed me an' said I run a pair o' crooked dice in on the game, so I shot him."

The two ladies were shocked. Mrs. Helen Stevens exclaimed, "I thought you said Bump attacked you!"

"That's what he done," repeated Haddock stubbornly. "He cussed me an' accused me of runnin' in crooked dice."

Neither of the women could see how this constituted an attack; but the men saw it.

"Yes'm, that's an attack," nodded Ed Nickerson as an expert. "A man's got to cuss an' accuse the other'n. He kain't jes pull an' shoot without a word. How would that look?"

"Well, if that's the truth," decided Mrs. Stevens slowly, "if it's true that Bump Peters wronged Mr. Haddock in the first place, then attacked him by calling names and accusing him of cheating, I think Mr. Bobbs might as well turn him loose. There's no case against him."

Everybody agreed on this. Mr. Bobbs nodded his head. Even Heber Tinnon, the jailer, who received for each prisoner 80 cents a day for twenty cents' worth of food served, was willing to make this personal sacrifice in the name of justice.

Jim Haddock was apparently going to walk out of the lock-up a free man — subject, of course, to possible later action by the Lane County grand jury — when Poggioli suddenly bestirred himself. He said in a conversational tone: "Of course, you all see that these two lines of evidence contradict each other."

Everything came to a halt. Nobody saw it. The reason they did not see it was because they were shocked at Poggioli's bringing up *any* objection to Jim's freedom — after he himself had been its first advocate.

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"I thought you was on my side!" ejaculated Haddock.

"I told you I would try to see that you got justice," reminded Poggioli. "I told you that over the telephone."

"Yes, but whoever heard tell of a man bringin' up somethin' *ag'inst* the man he was tryin' to git jestice for!" objected Sim Langford.

"What is the contradiction, Professor Poggioli?" asked Mrs. Helen Stevens in bewilderment. "Looks to me like both arguments set Mr. Haddock free."

"They do, Mrs. Helen — but one argument sets Mr. Haddock free in one direction and the second argument in another. If Jim pleads that he killed Bump under the unwritten law, why should Bump have attacked Jim? If Jim pleads self-defense, it suggests Bump had been wronged by Jim, not Jim wronged by Bump. On the other hand, Bump made a dying confession that admitted he had wronged Jim — which tends to prove that after Bump's original wrong Jim did something that deeply offended Bump. Now exactly what that was I don't know, but it has something to do with the five money orders Jim sent to San Francisco to bring home his wife and child.

"The only man who can clear up this riddle," continued Poggioli, "is the White Oak mailman, Mr. Poke. He knows why Jim sent off the five money orders and to whom."

At this Zack Poke began backing toward the door of the lock-up.

"Aw, naw. Naw, naw. I don't know a thaing. And I kain't give out no information atall — it's ag'inst postal laws an' regerlations."

"Zack, why did you form a bad opinion of Mr. Haddock for sending money to bring home his wife and baby?" asked Poggioli earnestly.

"Ast Jim there if you want to know. I'm tellin' nothin'. I wouldn't give up my job to send half this county to the penitentiary."

Both women were now on tenterhooks. "Jim, you go ahead and tell us what it was. You've spoken so fair about everything. . . ."

"All right, I will," said Haddock. "The reason I hadn't tol' you-all before, I was afeard you wouldn't understan' it right." Jim cleared his throat and swallowed. "Them money orders I sent off, I sent 'em to Mrs. Kissuyah Peters." Jim stared at his quasi-jury, and the jury stared back.

"Then you were living with Bump's wife!" interpreted Mrs. Helen Stevens. "Kissuyah was Bump's wife!"

"Naw, not that atall, Miss Helen. When I tuk Bump over to show him Kissuyah an' my little boy, he was so tuk with her he went back nex' day an' offered to marry her an' bring her to America if she would quit havin' anything to do with me. So she tuk him up an' quit, and that's how he rolled me — she'd been devilin' me to marry her ever sence little Jimmu come, anyway. Now that's all they is to it."

"What made you send her money to come here?" asked Mrs. Lane.

"I jest wanted to show up Bump

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for the snake he was. He had no intention of braingin' her here — never had. He couldn't live with her on White Oak noway — they don't allow colored people to live there. His whole marriage was jest a scheme to take Kissuyah away from me an' spoil our home; that's why I'm pleadin' the unwritten law. Sendin' her the money orders is what made Bump mad at me, why he cussed me at the crap game, an' why I had to shoot him in self-defense. That's how I claim my freedom both under the unwritten law an' also self-defense."

All was now perfectly clear — but more confusing than ever! In the first place, the unwritten law has never before been applied to any women but Caucasians; in the second place, mistresses have never taken priority over wives. But an honest mésalliance, upset by a false marriage, definitely has its rights!

"I tell you," decided Deputy Sheriff Bobbs, "this ralely is too much for us to decide — too complicated. I say let Jim go on home with the rest of his folks an' leave it up to the grand jury."

At this Taylor Lane interposed sharply. "No, we won't leave this to the grand jury, Bobbs. Arrest Jim Haddock for obtaining money from the People's Bank of Lane County under false pretenses!"

Mr. Lane shook a finger at the near-prisoner. "He borrowed that money from the bank to ship home some bamboo furniture he had bought in Japan — at least, that's what he told me he was going to do with it!"

Ed Nickerson asked in a shocked undertone: "Did'je, Jim?"

Jim Haddock gave a faint nod.

"Why the devil don't you deny it," counseled Ed in a whisper.

"I kain't," said Haddock in a flat voice. "*I give him a lien on the furniture!*"

That, of course, ended the investigation before the quasi-jury. The quasi-prisoner was now a real prisoner. Everybody felt sorry for him except Taylor Lane. Bankers are selected for their training and temperament, or they wouldn't succeed as bankers. The jailer, Heber Tinnon, opened the cell door and waited for Haddock to enter.

At this unhappy point we heard a honking from outside the lock-up. The door opened and the voice of Tump Pack, who ran Lanesburg's taxi, said, "Heah we is, Ma'am."

And into the dim light stepped two little figures which might have been done in cloisonné. The two rushed up to Jim Haddock, the bank swindler, who received them with open arms.

"Kissuyah . . . Jimmu . . . how did you-all fin' me here, Honey?"

"I asked the man who drove us if he knew where I could find you or Bump. He said nobody could keep up with you two. I said that in camp in Korea I could always find at least one of you in the guardhouse. He asked what is a guardhouse. I said it is the place where they keep men locked up. He said, Oh, yes, sure, that's the lock-up; I'll take you there, and if they ain't in, just sit down and wait — they'll show up."

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A straight detective story by a famous British poet and humorist

MURDER AT ELEVEN

by A. A. MILNE

YES, SIR, I DO READ DETECTIVE stories. Most policemen will tell you that they don't. They laugh at 'em, and say that they aren't like real life, and that tracking down a murderer isn't a matter of deduction and induction and all the rest of it, which you do by putting your fingertips together or polishing your horn-rim spectacles, but of solid hard work, over a matter of months maybe. Well, so it is for the most part, I'm not denying it. But why should I want to read books which tell me what I know already? The more detective stories are *unlike* the sort of story I'm living, the better I'm pleased. I read 'em for the same reason that you read 'em — to get away from my own life for a bit.

Ever reasoned out why murderers in detective stories are always shooting themselves, or getting killed in a car crash, or falling over a cliff? Ever noticed that? I mean why a story-book murderer hardly ever gets brought to trial? Of course, sometimes it's because he's the heroine's Uncle Joseph, and it spoils the honeymoon if you suddenly wake up and remember that your Uncle Joseph is being hanged that morning. But there's another reason. Proof. All this amateur deducting and inducting is very clever, and I don't say it doesn't find the murderer sometimes; but it doesn't *prove* he's the murderer. Any Police Inspector knows half a dozen murderers he'd like to see with a rope round their necks, but he can't do anything about it. Proof — that's the trouble. I don't mean the sort of proof which convinces a reader who knows anyhow that his favorite detective is always right; I mean the sort of proof which convinces a Jury when the Judge has taken out all the bits which aren't legal evidence, and the prisoner's Counsel has messed up the rest of it. And that's saying nothing about the witnesses who have let you down. No, it's an easy job being an amateur detective, and knowing that you've only got to point out to the murderer that logically he must have done it, to be sure that he'll confess or commit suicide in the last chapter. It isn't so easy for a country Inspector like me, with a Super and a Chief Constable and a Judge and a Jury to satisfy. Murderers? There're hundreds of 'em alive now, all because they didn't come into being in detective stories.

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All the same, I did know an amateur detective once. Clever he was, he worked it all out, just the way they do in detective stories. Helped me a lot. But there you are. We were both quite certain who the murderer was, and what could we do? Nothing. I put in everything I knew, all the old solid routine stuff, but I couldn't take the case any further. No proof. Only certainty. I'll tell you about it if you like.

Pelham Place it was called, and a fine place too. Mr. Carter who lived there was a great one for birds. He had what they call a Bird Sanctuary in the middle of the park. It was in a wood, and there was a lake in the middle of the wood, fed by a little river, and all sorts of water-birds came there, ousels and kingfishers and so on, and he used to study them and photograph them for a book he was writing about them. I don't know whether it would have been a good book, because he never wrote it. He was killed one day in June, hit on the head with what we call a blunt instrument, and left there. Of course he had a lot of notes and photographs for the book, but it never got finished.

He hadn't made a will, and everything was divided equally between the four nephews, Ambrose and Michael Carter and John and Peter Whyman. Ambrose, that was the eldest, the one who lived there, wanted to hand the place over to the National Trust, which he said was what his uncle always meant to do, but the others wouldn't agree, so it was sold and they divided up the money. When war came, the Army took it over, and of course that was the end of any sort of bird sanctuary.

Ambrose — that's my amateur detective — looked after the place and helped his uncle with the birds and the book. He said that watching birds wasn't so much different from watching people, and it was the best way of training your powers of observation which he knew, and there was a lot of detective work in it too, and I daresay he was right. It was natural that he should feel more keenly about the place, and want to carry out his uncle's wishes, and equally natural that the other three shouldn't. John and Peter were brothers. John was an actor, mostly out of work; and Peter had just got engaged — he was a barrister but hadn't had any briefs yet; so they both wanted all the money they could get. Michael Carter was Ambrose's cousin; he was in business and doing pretty well, but he had an expensive wife, and money was money. So there it was.

The first I heard of it was from Ambrose, who rang up and said that Mr. Henry Carter of Pelham Place had been murdered, and could I send somebody up at once. I couldn't get hold of our doctor, he was on a case somewhere; so I left a message for him, took a sergeant with me and drove off. I don't know why, but I had expected to find the body

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in the house, sort of taken it for granted, and I was a bit surprised when Mr. Ambrose Carter — I'd come across him once or twice, of course — who was waiting for me at the front door, said, "Round to the left here and take the first fork on the right," to the driver, and got into the car. And then he said, "Sorry, Inspector, hope you don't mind my giving orders. It's in Sanctuary Wood. We can get a bit nearer to it this way." Seemed to have his wits about him, which is what I like.

Well, this is what had happened. Mr. Carter had gone out to his sanctuary at about 10 in the morning the day before. He generally spent the whole day there and came back in time for dinner, but every now and then he'd stay the night, so as to be ready for the birds at the first light; so when he didn't turn up the night before nobody missed him.

"Where did he sleep?" I asked.

"There's a hut there. You'll see."

"Food?"

"Yes, and a spirit lamp and all that. It's quite comfortable. I've spent a night there more than once."

"So nobody thought anything of it when he wasn't there at dinner?"

"Well, there was comment, naturally, but we were just a family party, and most of us knew what Uncle Henry was like."

"Then when did you get anxious — or didn't you?"

"He would have been back in the morning for a bath and what little breakfast he had. John, my cousin, and I went to look for him. We thought perhaps he'd been taken ill. John's there now, not that there was the slightest chance of anybody interfering with — with the body. Nobody ever goes there. It's complete sanctuary."

If that was right, then it was a family job. So I'd better give you an idea of the family as I met them. Ambrose and John both had what I call actors' faces though they weren't a bit alike. John Whyman was tall and dark and handsome with the sort of Irving face — you know what I mean? About 30 and a bit cynical-looking. Ambrose Carter, a little older, had one of those round blank comedian's faces which can take on any expression — d'you know the sort? Medium height. Might be fat one day.

He stopped the car and we walked a short way across the park to a wood. The lake in the middle of the wood — well, it was a large pond, really, I suppose — was as lovely a thing as I've seen, and the trees — but we'll skip all that or I shall be all night talking. John Whyman was sitting on a log, smoking a cigarette, and he looked at his watch as we came up and said, "A whole bloody hour," and Ambrose said, "Sorry, John, couldn't have been quicker. This is Inspector Wills." He hadn't seen anybody or anything, of course, and I sent him off in the car with Sergeant Hussey, and told Hussey to wait at the house for the doctor and bring him back. And I wrote

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out a message for him to send, because I could see that we would want more help. And then Ambrose and I looked at the body.

"Fond of him?" I said.

"Enough not to kill him, do you mean?" he said, looking at me rather comical.

"I didn't mean that, sir, at all," I said, and it's true, I didn't.

"Sorry, Inspector. And the answer is that we got on very well together. I liked my job, but I can't say that I either liked or disliked him. He was a little — inhuman. More interested in birds than men, and had never had any great affection for anybody, I should say."

"I know the sort," I said.

Mr. Carter lay on his back. His head and his right wrist were broken, as if he'd put his arm up to defend himself from the first blow, and been killed by the next. It looked as if he'd been dead for some time.

"When was he last seen alive?" I asked.

"About half-past 9 yesterday morning," said Ambrose.

"Well, he wasn't alive more than two or three hours after that, I should say, but we'll know more when the doctor comes."

"Meanwhile, what about his watch? That ought to tell us something."

I bent down to look at his wrist. The watch had been badly smashed but I could see the time. Eleven o'clock. Murder at 11, I said to myself. Good title for a detective story.

"Hallo, that's funny," said Ambrose. "I could have sworn —" He stopped suddenly.

"What?" I asked.

"— that he wore his watch on his left wrist," he said, a little lamely. It sounded as if it wasn't what he'd been going to say.

"Where was it when you and Mr. Whyman first saw him?"

"Where it is now, I suppose," he said, staring.

"You didn't notice particularly?"

"I noticed that his wrist and his watch were smashed, without paying much attention to it. Subconsciously I assumed it was his left wrist, as that's where you keep a watch. That's why I was surprised."

"You're certain Mr. Carter did?"

"Absolutely. Look, you can see the strap-mark on his left wrist."

It's true, you could. I should have come to it in time, but he was quicker. Bird-watching.

He walked round the body and looked down from behind it. Then he laughed softly to himself.

"What's the joke, sir?"

"Well, well, well," he was saying. I went over to him and looked too. The watch was the wrong way round.

"You see what happened, Inspector? The murderer broke Uncle Henry's wrist before he managed to kill him. Then he changed the watch to the broken wrist, and broke it too. So now you know that the murder took place at precisely 11 o'clock. Which you wouldn't have known otherwise."

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"Looks like it," I said.

"Like tying another man's tie for him. More difficult than you think. You're looking at the watch the other way round. What's right for you is wrong for him."

"What it comes to," I said slowly, "is that he wanted us to put the murder at his own chosen time."

"Right."

"Which means that it *didn't* take place at 11."

"Right. Which means — what, Inspector?"

"Which means," I said, rather proud at seeing it, "that the murderer probably has an alibi for 11."

"Probably?" he said, surprised like. "Certainly. Or why alter the watch? Well, we know *something* about him."

"But that's all we do know. We don't know what time he *hasn't* got an alibi for. The time of the murder."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," he said rather airily. You know what I mean — rather sure of himself.

The ground was dry and hard. No footprints or anything like that. I had a couple of men coming and they could look for the weapon, but they wouldn't find it, because it was probably in the middle of the lake. As soon as the doctor came I wanted to get back to the house and ask a few questions. Meanwhile I might as well listen to Mr. Ambrose, if he fancied himself as Sherlock Holmes, because he seemed to have ideas, and good ones too. We sat down on a log together and smoked.

"Let's have it, sir," I said.

"Have what?"

"What you've got up your sleeve, about the time of the murder."

"Nothing up my sleeve, Inspector, I assure you. Your guess is as good as mine."

"I haven't started guessing yet," I said. "You go first."

"D'you mean it? Good!" He beamed at me. "First of all, what would you say the limits are — I mean, from the condition of the body?"

"We shall have to wait for Dr. Hicks to tell us that. And he'll make 'em pretty wide. Maybe six hours or so."

"As much as that? Oh, well, let's see what we can do. Now the first thing — Oh!" He stopped suddenly, and looked uncomfortable.

"Yes, sir?" I said.

"I was forgetting. Of course, that's the first thing to be settled." He was talking to himself rather than to me, and I waited a little, and then said, "What is?"

"Where are you looking for your murderer, Inspector?"

"Haven't begun to look yet, sir."

"Inside the house or outside?"

"I shall want to see everybody inside, of course. And I daresay a lot of people outside too. Any reason yourself, sir, for thinking it was one or the other?"

"The best of all reasons for thinking it was outside."

"You mean the best of all reasons for *hoping* it was outside?"

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He laughed and said, "I suppose I do," and then to himself, "I suppose that's all I mean, dammit."

"I should like you to be frank with me," I said. "A murderer's a murderer, even if he's a relation."

"That's true." He threw his cigarette-end away, and lit another. "I'll give you both sides," he said. "A tramp or a trespasser, an outsider of some kind, comes whistling through the wood, knocking at the undergrowth with the stick he carries, making the hell of a row, and disturbing all the birds. My uncle rushes out at him furiously — as he certainly would — and asks him what the devil he thinks he's doing. There's a fight, the tramp hits him in self-defense, loses his head, and hits him again. Easy."

"Except for the watch," I said.

"Exactly, Inspector. You've got it — except for the watch. In the first place, a tramp wouldn't think of it; in the second place, he'd have a long way to go for an alibi, and a tramp's alibi isn't much good anyway; and in the third place, he wouldn't dare to put the watch on, in case the body was found before the false time was reached, or put it back in case Uncle Henry had been seen alive afterwards."

"Doesn't that apply to any murderer who fakes the time?" I asked.

"Yes. Except in special circumstances."

"And those are —?"

"That you *know* that the murdered man is going to remain in a certain place for a certain time, and, dead or alive, will be visited by nobody."

"Which was true in this case, and which everybody in the house knew?"

"Yes," he said, rather reluctantly.

"And, I suppose, the outside men, gardeners and gamekeepers and so on — they would know too?"

"That's true," he said, brightening up. "Oh, well, then, just as a bit of theorizing. . . . If you murdered a man at 3, and were altering his watch to two or four, which would you choose?"

"Which would you, sir?" I asked.

"Two o'clock, obviously."

"I don't see the obviously."

"Well, if I make it 2 o'clock, it's because I've already got an alibi for 2. But if I make it 4, it's because I hope to get an alibi for 4; and I can't be absolutely certain that I shall. Something might go wrong. I might be with somebody then, but his memory might be bad, or he mightn't have a watch, or he might be a notorious liar. The other way I have made certain of a perfect alibi first, and I put *back* the watch to a time when I can prove I was elsewhere. Even if it is an unplanned murder, there's such a time somewhere."

Well, that was true enough. Perhaps I should have thought of it — but perhaps I shouldn't, I don't know.

"All right then," he went on. "The murder took place *after* 11. How long after? If it were very soon after he couldn't have an alibi

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for 11 which was watertight. He's got to allow a margin for watches being wrong, and another for his distance from the place of the alibi — in this case, the house, presumably; a good twenty minutes away, if he walked, for he would hardly dare to leave a car about. I think that one's feeling would be for a good safe margin of an hour. You've got your alibi for 11 and a bit after, you kill at 12, and you put the watch back to 11."

"Then why not kill at 1 or 2 or 3? Still safer by your reckoning."

"Lunch," he said. Just like that.

"Does a murderer let his lunch interfere with his plans?" I laughed, sort of sarcastically.

"Not *his* lunch, the dead man's. You can tell, can't you, when a dead man had his last meal?"

"That's right, sir — stupid of me."

"Uncle Henry would have his at any time between 12:30 and 1:30, and what's the good of pretending he died at 11, if he'd just finished his lunch? No, Inspector, the absolute limits for the time of death are 11:30 to 12:30, and the nearer to 12 the better."

Well, that was clever, it really was, and I couldn't see anything against it.

"All right, sir," I said. "He was killed at 12. That means that the murderer has no alibi at all for 12 and a watertight one for 11."

"As you say, Inspector."

"In that case, sir, I will ask you where *you* were at 11 and 12."

He gave a great shout of laughter.

"I knew you would," he said, twinkling at me. "I felt it coming."

"Nothing meant, sir, of course, but we have to know these things. Same with everybody at the house."

"Of course. Well, let's think. I walked over to Weston to lunch with some friends. Name given on demand. I left the house a bit after 10, and went over to the garage; talked to a chauffeur and a gardener or two till 10:30, and got there, I suppose, at 12:30. It's four miles, isn't it, through the fields, but it was a hot day, and why hurry?"

"Why not take the car, sir? I suppose there was a car available?"

"Mrs. Michael wanted to go into town to do some shopping. Besides," he patted his stomach and looked at mine, "walking's good for the figure."

"Meet anybody?"

"Not to remember or identify."

"Did the others know you were going?" I asked.

"We discussed plans a bit at breakfast. Michael was — oh, but you'll prefer to ask them yourself. Sorry."

I thought that I might as well know what they had planned to do, even if they didn't do it, or pretended they hadn't. So I told him to go on.

"Michael always brings down masses of papers with him. He's the sort of man who works in the train. I told him he could have my room, and I'd send him in a drink later, and he told his wife that he'd be busy all morning. Peter and his girl — well, you know what the plans

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of a newly engaged couple are, Inspector. As long as they are together, they don't mind where they are. I wanted to fix John up for golf, he's always very keen, but an agent or a manager or somebody was ringing him up at 11, and that would have made it rather late. So he said that, as soon as his call had come through and he'd done his business, he'd take an iron out in the park and knock around a bit. I don't know if he did or when he did or, in fact, what any of them did, but that's what was said at breakfast."

He got up suddenly, as if he had an idea, and I asked him what it was, because I'd had a sudden idea too.

"His notes," he said. "What idiots we are!"

"I was just going to ask you," I said, and I was, because I thought if he was watching a couple of birds nesting or something he'd make a note of the times when things happened, or anyhow make a note of the time of any photographs he'd taken. That hidey-hole! You wouldn't have known it wasn't a great beech trunk with bushes all round, and inside a regular home from home. And there was his diary, and the last entry was 10:27!

"What d'you know about that?" I said to Mr. Ambrose.

"It's funny," he said, picking up the diary and turning the pages backwards and forwards. "After all our clever theorizing, too. He would hardly go an hour and a half without an entry or a photograph. Hallo!"

"What?"

"Last entry comes at the bottom of the page. Coincidence?"

"You mean a page might have been torn out? A page going on to 12 o'clock?"

"Yes."

"If so, the corresponding page would be loose."

We looked. There was no loose page, but the corresponding page way back in March was missing. We knew, because an entry broke off in the middle and never went on. Well, it all fitted in, and Mr. Ambrose looked rather pleased with himself again.

Well, that was my amateur detective, and very good too, I thought; and now I'll tell you what the professionals got. Mr. Carter's last meal was breakfast, and, putting his lunch time at 12:30, he was killed between 9:45 and 12:30. So our guess at 12 was probably right. But when I came to alibis — and remember, the murderer had to have one for 11, but not for 12 — things began to go a bit wrong. There was a woodman called Rogers who had no alibi at all, and the other employed men gave each other alibis for the whole morning. Mr. Michael Carter was shut up in Mr. Ambrose's study all the time, or so he said. He was a solid, bossy sort of man; looked older than Ambrose, though he wasn't.

"Nobody came in that you can remember?"

"A maid brought me a whiskey

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and soda some time in the course of the morning. I hadn't ordered it, but I drank it."

"When would that be, sir?"

"She might know; I don't." Much too busy a man to notice such trifles, he seemed to be saying.

Doris, the maid, confirmed this, but was uncertain of the time. "It was his elevenses as you might say, sir, only Annie sitting down on a queen wasp and naturally having to go upstairs to put something on and me helping her and then taking it in myself, well it all made it late like."

Mr. Peter and Miss Mayfield — that was his girl — gave each other complete alibis, as did the chauffeur and Mrs. Michael. Of course you'll say that Mr. Peter's real alibi, for 12 o'clock, being only confirmed by a girl in love with him, wasn't very satisfactory. But how I looked at it, if the girl was going to give him an alibi anyhow, all that business of changing the hands of the watch to 11 and then smashing it was pointless. Any time was alibi-time for him.

Mr. John Whyman was the one I was most disappointed in. His call had come through at 10:30 — not 11, as he had expected and I had hoped; it was over by 10:35; and he took an iron and half a dozen golf balls, and went off into the park. All of which was confirmed by the Post Office and Mrs. Michael.

So there we were, and, after all our checking up, the possibilities came down to these:

(a) Michael Carter, assuming his drink had come in at 11:10, as he would have known; which gave him an alibi for 11 o'clock in the wood; and no alibi for 12.

(b) Rogers; but only if John Whyman had altered the watch when left alone with the body, and had torn out the page of the diary. Why should he do this? Because he was afraid he might be suspected of the murder, being the hardest-up of the nephews, and having discussed with Ambrose the possibility of getting help from his uncle.

(c) Any tramp, with John Whyman assisting again. But this was very unlikely, as the wood was in the middle of a private park, a long way from the road.

In the last two cases why didn't John make the time 10:30, when he had an alibi, instead of 11 when he hadn't?

No reason. So you can take out (b) and (c), and that leaves Michael Carter.

And then I'm blessed if that wretched little Doris didn't come and say that what with one thing and another, and talking it over with Annie like, and not noticing the time Annie making such a fuss and all, it was 12 o'clock before she took in the whiskey.

So Mr. Michael Carter was out too — and nobody did it.

I had a good think about it that night. I lay in my big chair, and put a pipe on and a drink handy, and

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another chair for my feet. Because the Super was wanting to take a hand, and I thought I should like to tell him who'd done it before he got all the credit for himself, or called in Scotland Yard.

The first thing I thought about was the watch.

Now it couldn't be clearer than it was that the murderer had done some funny business with that watch so as to fool us about the time. Look at what we had: the mark on the left wrist showing where it was usually worn; the fact that it was upside down, showing that it was put on the other wrist by somebody else; and the page torn from the diary, showing that the real time of death was being hidden from us. What could be clearer than that? "Nothing," I said to myself . . . and then found myself saying, "Nothing" again in a wondering sort of voice, and going on, "Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The murderer *couldn't* have made it clearer!"

Silly of me, wasn't it, not to have seen it before. Why should the murderer want to make it so clear to us that 11 o'clock was the wrong time, unless it was because 11 o'clock was the right time? You see, if he had broken the watch in the ordinary way on the left wrist, then, whatever time he'd put the hands at, he couldn't be sure we'd accept it. Because everybody knows that the hands of a watch or clock can be altered to suit a murderer's plan. So he did a double bluff. He made us think that he had to get the watch on the right wrist because the wrist was already broken, and he let us think that he hadn't noticed the clues he was leaving behind. In fact, the murder took place at 11, and this was the murderer's clever way of making us think that it didn't.

Mr. Michael Whyman, then, could have done it. He had no alibi for 11. Everybody was out of the house by 10:35, and he was alone until 12 when Doris brought in the drink.

I took my feet down and told myself that I had solved the case . . . and then I put my feet up again and told myself that I hadn't. Because Ambrose and John could have done it equally well. Neither of them had an alibi for 11. So I had a drink and lit a fresh pipe, and went on thinking.

Motive and opportunity made it pretty certain that one of the four nephews did it. If the one who did it was trying to make us think that the murderer had an alibi for 11, wouldn't he make sure that one at least of the other three had such an alibi? Only so could he feel safe. Well, what about it? Did Michael know where Ambrose was at 11? No. Ambrose might have been anywhere. So might John. Did John know where the others were? No. He didn't know where Ambrose was, and even if he knew that Michael was in Ambrose's office, he wouldn't know if Michael could prove it. Did Ambrose — and at that I shot out of my chair, banged my fist

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into my palm, and shouted "Ambrose!"

He had ordered a drink to be sent in to Michael at 11. That was to be Michael's alibi! John, he knew, had a telephone call coming in at 11; that would be John's. It wasn't his fault that both alibis failed him. Ambrose! The amateur detective who had led me on, who had pointed out the mark on the left wrist, and the upside-down watch, and the missing page of the diary; who was taking no risks with a stupid country policeman, but handing it all to him on a plate. Ambrose, who had asked all of them their plans at breakfast and known where everybody would be. Ambrose, who had so casually let me know that two of his cousins had an alibi for 11. Ambrose, who had proved so convincingly that the murder took place at 12, when neither cousin would have an alibi! Helpful Ambrose!

Well, there you are, sir. If he hadn't been so clever, if he hadn't done so much amateur detecting in the wood, I shouldn't have tumbled to it. Helped me a lot, he did. There didn't seem any way of getting legal proof, and we never did prove it. But, as I said at the beginning, we both knew who'd done it.

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Dr. Coffee, the modern Dr. Thorndyke, vs. Zygon, wholesaler of dreams

THE SWAMI OF NORTHBANK

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

THE PRECISE LITTLE MAN WITH THE bald head and the rimless octagonal eyeglasses told a strange story. His name, he said, was Duncan Floyd and he represented the Great Lakes and Southern Underwriters, who had insured Sandra Farriston's diamond earrings for $50,000. He was worried about Sandra's earrings and a Hindu crystal-gazer who called himself Zygon, the Swami of Northbank.

"The only swami in Northbank I know of," said Max Ritter, lieutenant of police detectives, "is Dr. Motilal Mookerji, and he don't tell fortunes. He's resident in pathology at Pasteur Hospital. Came here from Calcutta on a scholarship. What have you got on this Zygon?"

Floyd had nothing definite on Zygon except that his methods of operation resembled those of a group of swindlers who had recently been preying on cities around Northbank. The swindler would be handsome and exotically dark. Endowed with second sight, crystal vision, and other occult powers, he preyed on well-fixed middle-aged women. Sometimes he used a jewel thief as accomplice.

"Madam," he would say, "you have come to consult me about a diamond ring. The ring was not stolen. You left it in such-and-such washroom. The maid picked it up before you returned, but terrified at being accused of theft, she has not dared dispose of it. It is hidden in — "

At this point the crystal ball would go dark and only a thumping big fee would make it light up again to reveal the hiding place. The ring, of course, would be there. One miraculous feat of divination like this was usually enough in a small city to assure the swami of a large and opulent clientele — until things got too hot and he moved on to cooler and greener fields.

"Has this bird Zygon been pulling stuff like that in Northbank?" Lieutenant Ritter asked.

"Not that I've been able to learn," the insurance man said.

"Then what do you expect the police department to do?"

"Sandra Farriston is giving a reception tonight," Floyd said. "Some big-shot concert manager is here from New York, and Northbank is turning out to gawk and kowtow. His name is Sewell. Sandra will wear her earrings, of course, and Zygon has been invited to put on some kind of séance. I'd feel a whole lot better if some of your boys were there, too."

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"I'll look into the matter," Max Ritter said.

Ritter's first look took him to the sixth floor of the Northbank Trust Company building where Zygon, wholesaler of dreams and broker in the occult, conducted his business. The office door, which bore the simple device *Zygon — Consultation by Appointment*, was situated between a dentist's office and an advertising agency, thus giving a feeling of security to clients with guilty secrets or scoffing husbands. Entering, Ritter found himself in an eerie, dimly lighted atmosphere reeking of incense. Black velvet drapes parted, and a slim, bronzed, dark-eyed man with a tightly wound white turban asked in a soft voice:

"You desire to consult Zygon?"

"I'm looking for the dentist," Ritter replied.

"Next door," said Zygon.

Ritter backed out mumbling apologies and memorizing Zygon's features and build. He would be able to recite to himself a perfect *portrait parlant* when he examined rogues' gallery photos later. Meanwhile he would call on Sandra Farriston.

Sandra lived on Indian Hill, which was a fashionable part of Northbank at the turn of the century. Its old frame houses, with their hip roofs, their shingled turrets and cupolas, their gables and dormer windows dripping with gingerbread, were still impressive in spring and summer when the Boston ivy was in leaf and concealed their need for paint. Sandra's house had its own special impressiveness. It was not merely the home of a music teacher who eked out a bare subsistence drilling scales and trills into Northbank brats; it was the shrine of Sandra's glamorous past, the sphinx-temple of her enigmatic present.

Sandra's past was symbolized by the photographs and framed playbills which lined the walls of her staircase, showing a young and beautiful opera singer in the roles of La Traviata, Tosca, and Madame Butterfly, and testifying to her performance in the 1920s at the San Carlo of Naples, the Costanzi of Rome, the Municipal Opera of Nice, and the Opéra Comique of Paris. Also obviously part of her past were the diamond earrings, currently the worry of Duncan Floyd.

The two huge, flawless, pear-shaped stones, which she wore pendent from fragile platinum chains, appeared publicly just five times yearly: for the opening concert of the Northbank Symphony, for the annual two-night stand of the Metropolitan Opera Company, and for Sandra's two receptions, which were attended not only by the best people of Northbank, but by prominent musical figures from Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and even New York.

Sandra's past was also symbolized — in malicious minds — by Josephine Farriston. According to Sandra, Josephine was the child of a dead brother. Sandra was grooming the girl for the opera stage. Josephine was away at

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some conservatory most of the year but she would be back for the reception. . . .

Max Ritter parked his car in the driveway at the side of the house, walked to the front, and twisted the old-fashioned bellpull.

The bell was not answered immediately. Deep inside the house Ritter thought he heard two angry voices. He could not distinguish words, but he was sure one voice was female and on the verge of tears. The other was a rumbling baritone.

Again Ritter rang. The voices stopped suddenly. After a brief silence Sandra opened the door. She was a stately, well-groomed woman clinging stubbornly to the hopeful side of 50. Her young, unwrinkled face belied her white hair, and she was slender as few divas manage to be.

When Ritter started explaining why he thought he should attend her reception, Sandra cut him short with, "I am sorry, but I cannot insult my guests by having police present. Anyone invited to my house is presumed to be honest. I don't need you."

"Maybe I'd better come anyhow," the detective said.

"You are not welcome and you will not be admitted."

"Hold on, madam. You're going to wear those diamond earrings, and the insurance people —"

"You will not be admitted," Sandra repeated, "without a search warrant. And no court will issue a search warrant without evidence of a crime having been committed. There has been no crime committed. Good day." And she closed the door.

Ritter grinned and walked around the side of the house. He stopped grinning when he saw the girl sitting in his car.

The girl was young, in her early twenties at most; she had a pretty face and lively eyes. She wore a narrow blue ribbon around her blonde hair.

"Hello," she said. "I'm Josephine Farriston. You're from the police, aren't you?"

"Am I?" Ritter countered. "Maybe that N.P.D. on my car door stands for 'No Passengers Desired.' I'd sure like to sit here and admire the fit of your pretty blue sweater, but I got work to do. Step down, sister."

"I've got to talk to you," Josephine said. "Did Sandra call you to keep Biff from coming to the party tonight?"

Ritter was suddenly interested. "Who's Biff?" he asked.

The girl's eyebrows lifted incredulously. She said, "Don't you know Biff Walters and his Catalina Catamounts? He played six months at the Blue Heaven Roof in New York. That's where I met him. When he finishes his twenty weeks at the Standing Room in Chicago, he's going to Hollywood to make a picture."

"Sandra doesn't like Biff?" Ritter said.

"And how! And vice versa."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm in love with him."

"And vice versa?"

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"Very much vice versa. Biff wants to marry me. Sandra wants me to be an opera singer."

"What's the matter with a little of each?" Ritter asked.

"Sandra says opera is a full-time job. And she's afraid if I marry Biff I'll turn out to be a blues singer with his band. Which I'd love, only Sandra has spent so much money trying to make me the greatest Mimi since Bori that I just can't let her down."

"Unless Biff can beat all those silly ideas out of Sandra's head?"

"Biff will be at the party tonight, if that's what you mean — unless you keep him out. Biff knows that Sandra has spent about all the money she has to get me started, and he's afraid she'll do something foolish to get more until I click."

"That's not what I mean. Wouldn't that be Biff in the house right now, fighting with Sandra?"

"Now? Biff? Oh, no!" Josephine's whole body registered surprise.

"Well, somebody's fighting with her. Go in and see for yourself," Ritter said, stepping on the starter. "I got work to do, sister." He eased her gently from the car.

Ritter drove directly to the offices of the Northbank Tribune and asked the society editor to show him the guest list for Sandra's reception. He was delighted to find the names of Dr. and Mrs. Daniel Webster Coffee among those invited. Dr. Coffee was pathologist at Northbank's Pasteur Hospital and an old friend of Ritter's. Ritter sometimes consulted Dan Coffee when routine police methods were not equal to crimes of more than ordinary subtlety.

"Hello, Max," Dr. Coffee said when Ritter phoned. "Yes, Julia and I are invited, but Julia's in bed with the sniffles and I'm certainly not going there alone."

"You could take Mookerji," Ritter said.

"Nothing doing, Max. You know how I hate putting on a tux."

"Doc, you gotta go. You gotta do some scientific observing for me, and I'd like that swami of yours to get a look at another swami who maybe ain't only not kosher, but not even Hindu."

"Sounds intriguing, Max. Tell me more."

"Meet me at Raoul's for a short beer after dinner, Doc, and I'll brief you," Ritter said.

When Dr. Coffee arrived at Sandra Farriston's, stiffly uncomfortable in boiled shirt and dinner jacket, he was immediately aware of an odd uneasiness, not only in himself but in the other guests. Under the gay surfaces of this reception lurked something unpleasant, something almost evil. Whatever it was, Dan Coffee was unable to put his finger on it; he was inclined to laugh at himself for a melodramatic fool.

There was nothing ominous about the string quartet that played softly on the stair landing, nothing portentous about the caterer's flunkies who passed elaborate *canapé's* and poured

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champagne from napkin-wrapped bottles. Even the corner of the room, converted by draped Oriental rugs into a den of mystery for Zygon, seemed far from sinister. The Swami of Northbank himself, resplendent in white silk tunic and purple satin turban, was only a swaggering mountebank as he stabbed cards out of a tarot deck with a jeweled dagger to tell the fortunes of goggle-eyed matrons.

It was only when the majestic Sandra took Dr. Coffee in hand that he realized the hostess herself was the focus of the strange uneasiness. Sandra moved in a trance, her features expressionless, her body tense with some suppressed emotion. Dr. Coffee murmured apologies for Mrs. Coffee and introduced his spheroidal brown Hindu companion whose pink cotton turban looked miserable indeed in comparison with the magnificence of Zygon.

"Dr. Mookerji, my resident pathologist," Dan Coffee said.

"Am exuberantly delighted and honored beyond limits of ignorant vocabulary," the Hindu said, peering beyond his hostess for a gap in the field through which he might maneuver his global bulk in the direction of his supposed countryman.

Dan Coffee went through the ordeal of being presented to several dozen overdressed, overpolite, and overweening bores. Remembering his briefing by Max Ritter, he paid particular attention to Duncan Floyd, the bald-headed little insurance man; to Sewell, the white-haired concert manager from New York; and to a lanky, self-assured, broad-shouldered youth with a crew haircut to whom he was not introduced but whom he assumed to be Biff Walters, since the young man spent most of his time gazing earnestly into the blue eyes of Josephine Farriston. Whenever Dan Coffee felt ready to go under from boredom or uneasiness, he looked at the couple and felt human again.

After being social for half an hour, which was ten minutes beyond his normal limit, Dan Coffee was rescued by Dr. Mookerji. The Hindu drew him to false seclusion behind the grand piano and declared solemnly:

"Am convinced that so-called Zygon is fraudulent phony. When addressed with phrase in Hindustani inquiring as to point of origin, he riposted in English that he was unfamiliar with Hindustani language. Upon shifting to Bengali, received similar response. Punjabi likewise. Alleged Zygon claims Dravidian origin, purporting to speak only South Indian dialect with which am not personally conversant. Am of opinion that pseudo-swami is too pale-faced for Southerner. Dravidians usually tend to blackish tints."

"We'll report that to Lieutenant Ritter," Dr. Coffee said.

At this point Sandra Farriston mounted to the third step of the staircase and clapped her hands for attention. She moved her head slowly from side to side, so that her huge teardrop earrings swung in short,

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brilliant arcs. Her manner was gracious from habit, but her voice was taut as she said:

"If you'll all be quiet for a few moments, and crowd closer to this side of the room, Swami Zygon will give us an unusual demonstration of his occult powers."

Feet shuffled and the guests surged forward restlessly. Dr. Coffee saw Floyd, the insurance man, edging through the crowd to get closer to Sandra and the earrings. He saw Biff Walters put down his champagne goblet, clench his fists and stare at Sandra with something like hate in his eyes. Then Sandra touched the light switch and the room went dark — except for a blue glow from Zygon's crystal ball which shone directly upward to bathe his face with ghostly luminosity. His turbaned head seemed to be detached from his body, floating uncannily in the darkness. Zygon muttered a few cabalistic phrases.

Seated at the concert grand almost at Dan Coffee's elbow, Josephine Farriston struck a few chords and began to sing. She sang with a small, rather girlish soprano, the pathologist thought, but her voice had a pleasing, intimate warmth.

Dr. Coffee was watching the spectral face of Zygon glowing at the other side of the room when the head suddenly disappeared. The light below the crystal ball had winked out.

Josephine sang the closing phrases of her song in complete darkness. The piano still hummed with the final chords when the voice of the unseen Zygon again began muttering some mumbo jumbo.

The muttering grew louder and shriller — until it was cut abruptly by a knife-sharp scream. The shriek rose to a crescendo of terror and died quickly in a strangled sob. Then silence.

Dr. Coffee shouldered his way through the darkness, pushing aside the unseen guests who stood between him and the light switch. A confused murmur seemed to float on the black silence. Dr. Coffee pushed and elbowed until his outstretched hand touched the wall, found the switch. Light flooded back into the room.

Zygon was still — or again — behind his crystal ball. He was standing. Twenty feet in front of him Sandra Farriston lay stretched on the rug, her eyes closed. As Dr. Coffee strode toward Sandra, Biff Walters bent over her to shake her shoulder.

"Come on, Sandra," Walters said. "No more theatrics. This isn't the last act of *Rigoletto*."

Walters placed his hands under Sandra's shoulders, withdrew them immediately, and stared at his crimson fingers.

Dr. Coffee was still stooped over Sandra when Duncan Floyd pushed through the awe-struck guests.

"Good Lord!" Floyd exclaimed. "Her earrings are gone."

"She's dead," Dr. Coffee announced.

There was a shocked silence. Behind the grand piano Josephine Farriston gasped, then sobbed.

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Dr. Motilal Mookerji waddled to the front door, threw it open, and spoke to a glowing cigarette-end on the porch.

"Leftenant Ritter, please enter without preliminary legal writs and warrants. Felonious crime has now been perpetrated."

During the next three hours the late Sandra Farriston's mansion was the scene of a grim and determined invasion. The police job seemed simple enough. Sandra had been murdered. Sandra's valuable earrings had been stolen. Nobody had left the house since the murder — Ritter himself would vouch for that. Whoever had the diamonds must be the murderer. Unfortunately, the diamonds could not be found.

A dozen detectives and policewomen had searched the sullen, frightened, or indignant guests. Another half-dozen detectives, aided by a worried, white-faced Duncan Floyd, hell-bent on preventing a loss for Great Lakes and Southern Underwriters, had gone through the house with rude and untidy thoroughness.

By the time the team of photographers and fingerprint men had packed up and left at midnight, only the following facts had been established:

Sandra Farriston had been stabbed to death with the jeweled Afghan dagger which belonged to Zygon. Because of its gem-encrusted hilt, no latent fingerprints could be developed.

The earrings had been torn from Sandra's ears, bruising the pierced lobes. The indication was that they had been snatched before Sandra was killed.

The fragile platinum chains from which the diamonds had hung were found under the piano with the twisted mountings — and without the stones.

Zygon had been searched to the most intimate recesses of his person and the diamonds were not found.

Nor were the diamonds found anywhere or on anyone.

Shortly after midnight, Max Ritter announced to Dr. Coffee, "I'm going to take Zygon downtown, Doc."

"Max, do you think Zygon is fool enough to commit murder with a weapon so easily traceable to him?"

"Zygon's no fool," Ritter replied, "which is exactly why he might do the obvious, counting on a logical guy like you or me to figure that he wouldn't do any such thing."

"He is Machiavellian impostor," Dr. Mookerji volunteered.

"I'd also like a little private jam session with the boogiewoogie boy," Ritter said. "The air will do you good, Walters."

"Biff doesn't know anything," Josephine said. "He was standing right beside me all the time I was singing. He kissed the back of my neck just before Sandra screamed."

"He was standing over Sandra when the lights went on," Ritter insisted.

"Where Biff goes, I go," Josephine said.

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"That's fine, sister. I'd like to listen to your voice some more, too. I picked up a few new tunes this afternoon I want to try on you. You can both ride with me. Brody, you and Jenkins take the swami."

"Correction, please. Alleged swami," said Dr. Mookerji.

The caravan formed at Sandra's front door. As the pale, perspiring, and protesting Zygon was helped into one police car between two detectives, Duncan Floyd approached Ritter.

"Mind if I come along, Lieutenant?" Floyd asked. "You can understand my concern. I'll follow in my own car."

"Okay, follow. Doc, we seem to be a little crowded. Think that hot rod of yours is good for another two-three miles?"

"Dr. Mookerji and I will be hot on your tracks," Dan Coffee said.

They were not very hot, because of the cold reluctance of Dr. Coffee's obsolescent carburetor to awake to action. In fact, by the time the pathologist and his Hindu resident had caught up with the caravan in Harding Park, the shooting had already started.

Dr. Mookerji had just remarked, "Were you observing, Doctor Sahib, that so-called swami was exhibiting gastric symptoms? Personally noted livid and anxious face, plus clammy skin."

"He probably ate too many of Sandra's rubber hors d'oeuvres," Dr. Coffee was saying, just as they came to the roadblock.

Three police cars were drawn up in echelon across the curving park road, with Duncan Floyd's car parked a little to the rear. Spotlights from the police cars slashed the night with hard, hot blades, raking the lawns, whipping trees and bushes. Flashes of gunfire flickered in the shrubbery.

When the first explosions beat upon the darkness, Dr. Mookerji seized Dan Coffee's arm. "Am perceiving signs of armed conflict, Doctor Sahib," the Hindu said. "Suggesting option for better part of valor."

"Let's park here outside the combat zone," Dan Coffee said.

The nervous staccato of police guns subsided with a few desultory shots and the whine of a ricochet bullet.

Biff Walters and Josephine were huddled in the back seat of Ritter's car. Ritter was standing beside the car, revolver drawn.

"Spurious compatriot is no doubt causing felonious shenanigans, eh, Leftenant?" said Dr. Mookerji.

"Yeah," Ritter said. "Zygon jumped when we slowed for the curve, and he landed running. He won't go far, though. He's wearing bracelets."

A shadow moving toward Ritter materialized as Duncan Floyd.

"I warned you he was a slippery character," the insurance man said. "I was afraid —"

A shout from the darkness interrupted him. "Over this way, Max. Looks like we winged him."

Six flashlight beams fingered the night, contracting as they converged on a tall plainclothesman standing

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beside a syringa bush. Dr. Coffee followed the lights. Zygon was lying under the bush, his turban partly unwound and caught in the lower branches. His face was gray and shiny with sweat. A bright red stain was spreading across the front of his white tunic. The wounded man groaned as Dr. Coffee examined him.

"Get him to the hospital," Dan Coffee said. "Quick."

Pasteur Hospital was just over the hill. The intern on emergency duty started giving plasma to Zygon while the stretcher cart was being rolled to the elevator. In the operating room the resident surgeon took one look at the unconscious man and ordered X-rays.

Dr. Coffee, Dr. Mookerji, and Max Ritter followed the stretcher cart to the X-ray department. They waited while the radiologist made a panorama of Zygon's midsection. As soon as the films were out of the developer and into the fixing bath, a technician gave the high sign and the little group crowded into the darkroom.

The resident surgeon glanced at the wet films, decided the bullet would have to come out, and went to scrub up while Zygon was rolled back to the operating room.

Dr. Coffee remained in the darkroom, studying the films. After a minute he gave a peculiar laugh.

"Apparently our friend Zygon has an appetite like an ostrich," he said. "Look at this."

Ritter peered over the pathologist's shoulder and the Hindu peeked under his arm. Dr. Coffee indicated a point on the film, just below the latticed shadows of the ribs. Two other shadows were clearly visible, shadows that must have been caused by two opaque objects several inches long and pear-shaped.

"No wonder we couldn't find the sparklers on him!" Ritter exclaimed. "He chewed the stones off the mountings and swallowed 'em."

"Some non-Hindu Indians quite notorious for ingesting strange foodstuffs," Dr. Mookerji said. "Gastric symptoms now explained."

"Anyhow, the case is solved," Ritter said. "Zygon killed Sandra and stole — Those are the earrings, aren't they, Doc?"

"They're certainly not smoke rings," the pathologist said. He was silent a moment as he re-examined the X-ray film. "Still, I'm not sure our solution is quite so simple. Where's Mr. Floyd, Max?"

"He's in the waiting room with Josephine and her boy friend. Brody's keeping an eye on 'em."

"Bring them to my lab, Max. I've a few questions."

Dr. Coffee carefully carried the wet film to his laboratory. When the insurance man came in, Dr. Coffee asked:

"Mr. Floyd, did you ever have Mrs. Farriston's earrings in your own possession?"

"Oh, yes," Floyd replied. "I had them appraised when I wrote the original policy about two years ago. And a few weeks ago, when the policy

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came up for renewal, we made a routine reappraisal."

Dr. Coffee produced the film. "Would you say, Mr. Floyd, that the objects shown in this X-ray photograph of Zygon's stomach resemble Mrs. Farriston's diamonds?"

"Good Lord!" Floyd excitedly extracted a micrometer caliper from his pocket and measured the shadows. "Those are the stones, all right. What a relief!"

"Where did Mrs. Farriston get the earrings originally?"

Floyd didn't know, but Biff Walters did.

"Josephine's father gave them to Sandra," Walters said.

"You mean Sandra's brother?" Ritter asked.

"I mean Sandra's ex-husband, Henry Sewell. He was there tonight."

"Is that true, sister? Was Sandra your mother?"

Josephine nodded, her eyes sad.

"Sandra thought it was a big secret," Walters continued. "She didn't even admit it to Josephine. But it's common knowledge around Carnegie Hall in New York that Sewell paid for Sandra's European successes in the late twenties. Sandra was never more than a third-rate singer, and she sang in French and Italian theaters because Sewell bought out the house on the nights she sang. You could also buy favorable criticism in the European newspapers in those days. When Sewell lost his money in the 1929 crash, he left Sandra. She divorced him in Paris before Josephine was born, without even telling him she was about to bear him a child. Sandra was proud."

"Has Sandra been giving Sewell the shakedown?" Ritter asked.

"Never!" Josephine said.

"Look," Ritter insisted. "Sandra's been borrowing like mad for years. She's mortgaged everything she owns to keep this gal headed for a career. Her credit's been running thin lately, and she even had trouble financing her shindig tonight. But I found out this afternoon that Sandra deposited five grand in her bank account yesterday — in cash. I'll find out from Sewell if the five G's didn't come from him."

Walters said, "You're all wet, Ritter. Sandra didn't give Josephine the name of Sewell. She never told him Jo was his daughter. She wanted to keep the girl all for herself. We had a big fight about it this afternoon. I was trying to convince Sandra it would be better for Jo to be a hit blues singer than a bad prima donna, and —"

His speech was cut short by the arrival of the resident surgeon. The surgeon's gauze mask dangled from one ear and there was blood on his short-sleeved white jacket. He carried a gauze-covered metal cup.

"I couldn't save your man," the surgeon said. "He died on the table. But I got the bullet. I suppose you'll want it."

"What about the diamonds?" Floyd demanded. "The man swallowed two very valuable diamonds."

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"Dr. Coffee will have to recover them for you when he does the autopsy," the surgeon said. He placed the cup on the lab workbench and departed.

"At least I can sleep tonight," the insurance man said. "Do you gentlemen need me any more now?"

Ritter shook his head. "Go on home," he said.

After Floyd left, Ritter lifted the gauze from the surgeon's cup. The bullet was slightly twisted, but it was not the usual shapeless mass of lead that is dug out of gunshot victims. It still resembled a bullet.

"Hell!" Ritter exclaimed. "This looks like a .32."

"Please, what is hellish about .32 bullet?" Dr. Mookerji asked.

"Every cop in Northbank carries a .38 police positive," the detective said. "If my boys didn't shoot Zygon, who did?"

"Dr. Mookerji and I had the opportunity," Dan Coffee said. "So did Mr. Walters and Miss Farriston."

"Floyd, too," admitted Ritter. "But I went over Floyd with a fine comb, and Miss Farriston and Walters here were searched, too. None of them could have been hiding a gun. After all, there are some things a guy can't swallow."

Dr. Coffee arose quickly as though a sudden idea had struck him from below. He grabbed his hat.

"Max, I've been stupid. Let's try to catch up with Mr. Floyd."

They had to wait several minutes for the elevator, and by the time they reached the ground floor, Floyd's car was gone from in front of the hospital.

"I know where he lives," Ritter said.

"Try his office first," said Dr. Coffee.

Floyd's car was standing in front of the office building. Ritter tried the door. The car was unlocked.

"He's careless," Ritter said.

"Or in a hurry," said Dr. Coffee. "Try the glove compartment."

There was nothing in the glove compartment but a tattered road map, a flashlight, and a square of chamois.

They rang the night bell. The sleepy night elevator operator took his time about answering. Yes, Mr. Floyd had come in a short while ago. Yes, he would take them up.

Duncan Floyd did not seem surprised to see them.

"Hello," he said. "I stopped by the office to draft my report to the home office. They'll be glad to know there won't be a claim to pay on the Farriston diamonds. What can I do for you gentlemen?"

"You can open that safe behind you," Dr. Coffee said.

"I'd be glad to," Floyd said, "except I've just had the combination changed, and I have trouble remembering it. We'll have to wait until my secretary comes down in the morning."

"Open it now," Ritter said. "Or I'll send for the Safe Squad."

"Well! What's the hurry? What the devil's in the safe?"

"Mrs. Farriston's diamonds," Dr. Coffee said.

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Floyd laughed. "Doctor, you assured me the diamonds were in Zygon's stomach. You yourself showed me the film. I saw the X-ray photo of the stones with my own eyes."

"You saw what Zygon *thought* were the Farriston diamonds," Dr. Coffee said. "But the gems in the X-ray photo are imitations."

"Well! Appraisal by photo." Again Floyd laughed. "Aren't you exaggerating the miracle of the X-ray, Doctor?"

"On the contrary. If Zygon had swallowed the true gems, they could not have been seen in the photo. Genuine diamonds are perfectly transparent to X-rays. False diamonds, however, are made of strass, a brilliant glass with a very high lead content. Don't you know, Mr. Floyd, that lead is opaque to X-rays?"

"Remember the combination now, Floyd?" Ritter said.

"I'll — I'll try. I'd like to prove you're wrong."

Floyd crouched in front of the safe, twirled the dials. The heavy door swung open. Floyd spun about as he straightened up. In his left hand was a small chamois bag. His right held a revolver.

"Hands up, gentlemen!" he ordered.

The detective and the pathologist complied. The bald-headed little man dropped the chamois bag into his pocket and yanked the telephone cord from its baseboard connections. He backed toward the door, taking keys from his pocket with his left hand.

"I find you are right after all, gentlemen," Floyd said. "So I will require a few hours' head start." He opened the door behind him. "There's a ten-story drop outside that window, and you'll find this lock very difficult to pick."

As Floyd started backing through the half-open door, his expression suddenly changed. His head jerked back.

A high-pitched voice in the hall said, "Kindly elevate hands above head, subsequent to relaxing grasp on revolver gun!"

Floyd dropped the revolver. Ritter pounced on it. Floyd re-entered the room, pushed from behind by Dr. Motilal Mookerji, who was poking something into the small of his back.

"Suggest use of manacles, Leftenant," Dr. Mookerji said, "in view of apparent homicidal intent of smallish hairless gentleman."

Ritter snapped steel about Floyd's wrists. The Hindu withdrew the bunch of keys he had been poking into Floyd's back and handed them to Dr. Coffee.

"Please pardon intrusion, Doctor Sahib," the Hindu said, "but remarked you were forgetting keys on laboratory workbench. Therefore, knowing Mrs. Coffee's dislike of rude awakenings in small hours of nighttime, I —"

"Swami, I could kiss you," Max Ritter said. He was examining Floyd's revolver. "It's a .32 all right. He musta transferred it from his car to the safe before we got here. How about it, Floyd?"

Floyd refused to talk without advice of his attorney. So Dr. Coffee

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reconstructed the case from his own deductions.

"Sandra Farriston evidently made some deal with Floyd to dispose of her diamonds, replace them with exact reproductions, and then collect insurance on the loss of the replicas," the pathologist said. "The five-thousand-dollar cash deposit no doubt represented a down payment on what was to have been a long-range scheme.

"But Sandra wanted more money in a hurry. Her peculiar pride made her prefer dishonesty to seeking help from a former husband. So she obviously made arrangements with Zygon to steal the imitation earrings, so she could collect the insurance. This unforeseen haste threw Floyd into a panic. He was in it for himself, not for Sandra, and he was taking a bigger risk than she was.

"I can see no other reason for the desperate measures he adopted. Before paying a $50,000 claim, the insurance company would put trained investigators on the case — while the original diamonds were still in Floyd's possession. I was sure they must have been still in his possession, to drive him to commit two murders. To try to prevent being caught in a $50,000 fraud, Floyd came to you in the afternoon, hoping to stop the projected robbery.

"When Sandra refused police protection — for good reason, as we have seen — Floyd grew even more desperate. And when Zygon actually stole the earrings in the dark, Floyd stabbed Sandra with Zygon's dagger. Sandra's death would eliminate a possible witness against him. It would precipitate police intervention so that Zygon would be caught with the earrings on his person: thus there would be no claim to pay and no insurance investigation. And finally Floyd would be left in full possession of the original gems — and a very neat clear profit for his trouble.

"However, Zygon's method of hiding the gems upset Floyd's new plan. The earrings were still missing, and an insurance investigation was still an unpleasant possibility. So when Zygon made a break in the park and your boys started shooting at him, Floyd took the gun which he obviously kept in his car — you hadn't searched his car, remember — joined in the hunt and bagged his game. He might have got away with it, too, if it hadn't been for Dr. Wilhelm Roentgen."

"Roentgen?" Max Ritter interrupted. "I thought the resident surgeon's name was Smith."

"Dr. Roentgen discovered X-rays," Dan Coffee said.

"Am foreseeing only one unhappy possibility arising from otherwise happy aforesaid solution," Dr. Mookerji said. "To wit, as follows. If title to high-priced diamonds is reverting to golden-haired Josephine with silver-plated voice, will not same lady feel compulsion to pursue dismal operatical career?"

"That," said Dr. Coffee, "is a matter I think we can well leave in the hands of Mr. Biff Walters."

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"If someone should undertake to name the four or five best known fictional detectives of the present day, H. C. Bailey's Reggie Fortune would belong near the head of the list. The Bailey stories are among the most ingenious in modern detective literature, and plump, drawling, unmistakably British Reggie is one of the most distinctive as well as one of the most popular of contemporary sleuths." — quoted from HOWARD HAYCRAFT

THE SUPERFLUOUS CLUES

by H. C. BAILEY

MR. REGINALD FORTUNE CAME into Superintendent Bell's room at Scotland Yard. "That was chocolate cream," he said placidly. "You'd better arrest the aunt."

The superintendent took up his telephone receiver and spoke into it fervently. You remember the unpleasant affair of the aunt and her niece's child.

"'Oh, fat white woman that nobody loves,'" Mr. Fortune murmured. "Well, well. She's not wholesome, you know. Some little error in the ductless glands."

"She's for it," said Superintendent Bell with grim satisfaction. "That's a wicked woman, Mr. Fortune, and as clever as sin."

"Yes, quite unhealthy. A dull case, Bell." He yawned and wandered about the room and came to a stand by the desk. "What are these curios?" He pointed to a skeleton key and a pad of cotton-wool.

"The evidence in that young doctor's case, the Bloomsbury diamond burglary. Not worth keeping, I suppose. That was a bad business though. I was sorry for the lad. But it was a straight case. Did you read it, sir? Young fellow making a start, hard fight for it, on his beam ends, gets to know a man with a lot of valuable stuff in his rooms — and steals it. An impudent robbery too — but that's the usual way when a decent fellow goes wrong, he loses his head. Lead us not into temptation. That's the moral of Dr Wilton's case. He's only thirty, he's a clever fellow, he ought to have done well, he's ruined himself — and if he'd had a hundred pounds in the bank he'd have run straight enough."

"A lot of crime is a natural product." Mr. Fortune repeated a favorite maxim of his. "I didn't read it, Bell. How did it go?" He sat down and lit a cigar.

"The trial was in this morning's papers, sir. Only a small affair. Dr. Horace Wilton came out of the army with a gratuity and a little money

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of his own. He set up as a specialist. You know the usual thing. His plate up with three or four others on a Harley Street house where he had a little consulting-room to himself. He lived in a Bloomsbury flat. Well, the patients didn't come. He wasn't known, he had no friends, and his money began to run out."

"Poor devil," Reggie nodded.

"A Dutch diamond merchant called Witt came to live in the flats. Wilton got to know him, prescribed for a cold or something. Witt took to the doctor, made friends, heard about his troubles, offered to get him a berth in the Dutch colonies, gave him two or three rough diamonds — a delicate way of giving him money, I suppose. Then one morning the valet — service flats they are — coming into Witt's rooms found him heavily asleep. He'd been chloroformed. There was that pad on his pillow."

Reggie took up the box in which the cotton-wool and the skeleton key lay.

"Don't shake it," said the superintendent. "Do you see those scraps of tobacco? That's important. The bureau in which Witt kept the diamonds he had with him had been forced open and the diamonds were gone. Witt sent for the police. Now you see that tobacco on the cotton-wool. The inspector spotted that. The cotton-wool must have been handled by a man who smoked that tobacco. Most likely carried it in the same pocket. Unusual stuff, isn't it? Well, the inspector remarked on that to Witt. Witt was horrified. You see it's South African tobacco. And he knew Wilton used the stuff. There was some spilt in the room, too."

"Have you got that?" said Reggie.

"No, I don't think it was produced. But our man saw it, and he's reliable. Then a Dutch journalist — Gerard — dropped in. He was just over in England. He'd called on Witt late the night before and couldn't make him hear. That surprised him because as he came up he'd seen someone coming out of Witt's rooms, someone who went into Wilton's. That was enough to act on. Wilton was arrested and his flat was searched. Tucked away in the window seat they found the diamonds and that skeleton key. He stood his trial yesterday, he made no defense but to swear that he knew nothing about it. The evidence was clear. Witt — he must be a soft-hearted old fellow — Witt tried to let him down as gently as he could and asked the judge to go easy with him. Old Borrowdale gave him five years. A stiff sentence, but the case itself would break the man's career, poor chap. A bad business, sir, isn't it? Impudent, ungrateful piece of thieving — but he might have been honest enough if he could have made a living at his job."

Mr. Fortune did not answer. He was looking at the key. He set it down, took up a magnifying glass, carried the box to the light and frowned over the cotton-wool.

"What's the matter with it, sir?"

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"The key," Mr. Fortune mumbled, still studying the cotton-wool. "Why was the key made in Germany? Why does Dr. Horace Wilton of Harley Street and Bloomsbury use a skeleton key that was made in Solingen?"

"Well, sir, you can't tell how a man comes by that sort of stuff. It goes about from hand to hand, don't it?"

"Yes. Whose hand?" said Reggie. "And why does your local expert swear this is South African tobacco? There is a likeness. But this is that awful stuff they sell in Germany and call Rauch-tabak."

Bell was startled. "That's awkward, sir. German too, eh?"

"Well, you can buy Solingen goods outside Germany. And German tobacco, too. Say in Holland."

"I don't know what you're thinking, sir?"

"Oh, I think the tobacco was a little error. I think the tobacco ought not to have been there. But it was rather unlucky for Dr. Wilton your bright expert took it for his brand."

The superintendent looked uncomfortable. "Yes, sir, that's the sort of thing we don't want to happen. But after all the case didn't turn on the tobacco. There was the man Gerard who swore he saw Wilton leaving Witt's flat and the finding of the diamonds in Wilton's room. Without the tobacco the evidence was clear."

"I know. I said the tobacco was superfluous. That's why it interests me. Superfluous, not to say awkward. We know Wilton don't use Rauch-tabak. Yet there is Rauch-tabak on the chloroformed pad. Which suggests that someone else was on the job. Some fellow with a taste for German flavors. The sort of fellow who'd use a German key."

"There's not a sign of Wilton's having an accomplice," said Bell heavily. "But of course it's possible."

Mr. Fortune looked at him with affection. "Dear Bell," he said, "you must find the world very wonderful. No, I wouldn't look for an accomplice. But I think you might look for the diamond merchant Witt and the journalist Gerard. I should like to ask them who smokes Rauch-tabak."

"There must be an investigation," Bell sighed. "I see that, sir. But I can't see that it will do the poor fellow any good. And it's bad for the department."

Reggie smiled upon him. "Historic picture of an official struggling with his humanity," he said. "Poor old Bell!"

At the end of that week Mr. Fortune was summoned to Scotland Yard. He found the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department in conference with Eddis, a man of law from the Home Office. "Hallo! Life is real, life is earnest, isn't it, Lomas?" he smiled.

The Hon. Sidney Lomas put up an eyeglass and scowled at him. "You know, you're not a man of science, Fortune. You're an agitator. You ought to be bound over to keep the peace."

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"I should call him a departmental nuisance," said Eddis gloomily. . .

"In returnin' thanks (one of your larger cigars would do me no harm, Lomas) I would only ask, where does it hurt you?"

"The Wilton case was a very satisfactory case till you meddled," said Eddis. "Also it was a *chose jugée.*"

"And now it's unjudged? How good for you!" Reggie chuckled. "How stimulating!"

"Now," said Lomas severely, "it's insane. It's a nightmare."

"Yes. Yes, I dare say that's what Dr. Wilton thinks," said Reggie gravely. "Well, how far have you got?"

"You were right about the tobacco, confound you. And the key. Both of German birth. And will you kindly tell me what that means?"

"My honorable friends," said Reggie, "question should be addressed to Mynheer Witt or Mynheer Gerard. You know, this is like Alice in Wonderland. Sentence first, trial afterwards. Why didn't you look into the case before you tried it? Then you could have asked Witt and Gerard these little questions when you had them in the box. And very interesting too."

"We can't ask them now, at any rate. They've vanished. Witt left his flat on the day of the trial. Gerard left his hotel the same night. Both said they were going back to Amsterdam. And here's the Dutch police information. 'Your telegram of the 27th not understood. No men as described known in Amsterdam. Cannot trace arrivals.' "

"Well, well," said Reggie. "Our active and intelligent police force. The case has interest, hasn't it, Lomas, old thing?"

"What do you suggest, Fortune?" Eddis looked at him keenly.

"I want to point out the evanescence of the evidence — the extraordinary evanescence of the evidence."

"That's agreed," Eddis nodded. "The whole thing is unsatisfactory. The tobacco, so far as it is evidence, turns out to be in favor of the prisoner. The only important witnesses for the prosecution disappear after the trial, leaving suspicion of their status. But there remains the fact that the diamonds were found in the prisoner's room."

"Oh, yes, someone put 'em there," Reggie smiled.

"Let's have it clear, Fortune," said the man of law. "Your suggestion is that the whole case against Wilton was manufactured by these men who have disappeared?"

"That is the provisional hypothesis. Because nothing else covers the facts. There were German materials used, and Wilton has nothing to do with Germany. The diamond merchant came to the flats where Wilton was already living and sought Wilton's acquaintance. The diamond merchant's friend popped up just in the nick of time to give indispensable evidence. And the moment Wilton is safe in penal servitude the pair of them vanish, and the only thing we

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can find out about them is that they aren't what they pretended to be. Well, the one hypothesis which fits all these facts is that these two fellows wanted to put Dr. Horace Wilton away. Any objection to that, Eddis?"

"There's only one objection — why? Your theory explains everything that happened, but leaves us without any reason why anything happened at all. That is, it's an explanation which makes the case more obscure than ever. We can understand why Wilton might have stolen diamonds. Nobody can understand why anyone should want to put him in prison."

"Oh, my dear fellow! You're so legal. What you don't know isn't knowledge. You don't know why Wilton had to be put out of the way. No more do I. But —"

"No more did Wilton," said Eddis sharply. "He didn't suspect these fellows. His defense didn't suggest that he had any enemies. He only denied all knowledge of the theft, and his counsel argued that the real thief had used his rooms to hide the diamonds in because he was surprised and scared."

"Yes. That was pretty feeble, wasn't it? These lawyers, Eddis, these lawyers! A stodgy tribe."

"We do like evidence."

"Then why not use it? The man Witt was very interesting in the box. He said that in the kindness of his heart he had offered this ungrateful young doctor a job in the Dutch colonies. Quite a nice long way from England, Eddis. Wilton wouldn't take it. So Wilton had to be provided for otherwise."

Eddis looked at him thoughtfully. "I agree there's something in that. But why? We know all about Wilton. He's run quite straight till now — hospital career, military service, his private practice all straightforward and creditable. How should he have enemies who stick at nothing to get him out of the way? A man in a gang of criminals is sometimes involved in a sham crime by the others to punish him, or for fear he should betray them. But that can't be Wilton's case. His life's all open and ordinary. I suppose a man might have private enemies who would use such a trick, though I don't know another case."

"Oh, Lord, yes," said Lomas, "there was the Buckler affair. And I always thought that was the motive in the Brendon murder."

Eddis frowned. "Well — as you say. But Wilton has no suspicion of a trumped-up case. He doesn't know he has enemies."

"No," said Reggie. "I rather think Wilton don't know what it is he knows. Suppose he blundered on some piece of awkward evidence about Mr. Witt or some of Mr. Witt's friends. He don't know it's dangerous — but they do."

"Men have been murdered in a case like that and never knew why they were killed," said Lomas.

"I daresay," Eddis cried. "It's all quite possible. But it's all in the air. I have nothing that I can act upon."

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"Oh, I wouldn't say that," said Reggie. "You're so modest."

"Perhaps I am," Eddis shrugged. "But I can't recommend Wilton's sentence for revision on a provisional hypothesis."

"Revision be damned," Reggie cried. "I want him free."

Eddis stared at him. "But this is fantastic," he protested.

"Free and cleared. My God, think of the poor beggar in a convict gang because these rascals found him inconvenient. To reduce his sentence is only another wrong. He wants you to give him his life back."

"It is a hard case," Eddis sighed. "But what can I do? I can't clear the man's character. If we let him out now, he's a broken man."

"My dear fellow, I'm saying so," said Reggie mildly. "There's also another point. What is it Mr. Witt's up to that's so important? I could bear to know that."

"That's not my job," said Eddis with relief. "But you're still in the air, Fortune. What do you want to do? I must take some action."

"And that's very painful to any good official. I sympathize with you. Lomas sympathizes with you more, don't you, Lomas, old thing? And I'm not sure that you can do any good." Mr. Fortune relapsed into cigar smoke and meditation.

"You're very helpful," said Eddis.

"The fact is, all the evidence against the man has gone phut," said Lomas. "It's deuced awkward, but we have to face it. Better let him out, Eddis."

Eddis gasped. "My dear Lomas! I really can't follow you. The only evidence which is proved false is the tobacco, which wasn't crucial. The rest is open to suspicion, but we can't say it's false, and it satisfied the judge and jury. It's unprecedented to reduce the sentence to nothing in such a case."

"I'm not thinking of your troubles," said Lomas. "I want to know what Mr. Witt has up his sleeve."

Reggie came out of his smoke. "Let Wilton out — have him watched — and see what Witt and Co. get up to. Well, that's one way. But it's a gamble."

"It's also out of the question," Eddis announced.

Reggie turned on him. "What exactly are you for, Eddis?" he said. "What is the object of your blessed existence?"

Eddis remarked coldly that it was not necessary to lose one's temper.

"No. No, I'm not cross with you, but you puzzle my simple mind. I thought your job was to see justice done. Well, get on with it."

"If you'll be so very good as to say what you suggest," said Eddis, flushing.

"You'll say it's unprecedented. Well, well. This is my little notion. Tell the defense about the tobacco and say that that offers a ground for carrying the case to the Court of Appeal. Then let it get into the papers that there's a doubt about the conviction, probability of the Wilton case being tried again, and so on.

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Something rather pompous and mysterious to set the papers going strong about Wilton." He smiled at Lomas. "I think we could wangle that?"

"I have known it done," said Lomas.

"Good heavens, I couldn't have any dealings with the press," Eddis cried.

"Bless your sweet innocence. We'll manage it. It don't matter what the papers say so long as they say a lot. That'll wake up Witt and Co., and we'll see what happens."

Eddis looked horrified and bewildered. "I think it is clear the defense should be advised of a flaw discovered in the evidence in order that the conviction may be reviewed by the Court of Appeal," he said solemnly. "But of course I — I couldn't sanction anything more."

"That's all right, my dear fellow," Lomas smiled. "Nobody sanctions these things. Nobody does them. They only happen." And Eddis was got rid of.

"My country, oh, my country!" Reggie groaned. "That's the kind of man that governs England."

A day or two later saw Mr. Fortune shivering on an April morning outside Princetown prison. He announced to the governor that he wanted to see Dr. Wilton.

"I don't think you'll make much of him," the governor shook his head. "The man seems stupefied. Of course a fellow who has been in a good position often is so when he comes here. Wilton's taking it very hard. When we told him there was a flaw in the evidence and he could appeal against his sentence, he showed no interest. He was sullen and sour as he has been all the time. All he would say was, 'What's the good? You've done for me.'"

"Poor devil," Reggie sighed.

"It may be." The governor looked dubious. "No one can judge a man's character on his first days in prison. But I've known men who gave me a good deal more reason to believe them innocent."

Dr. Wilton was brought in, a shred of a man in his prison clothes. A haggard face glowered at Reggie. "My name's Fortune, Dr. Wilton." Reggie held out his hand. It was ignored. "I come from Scotland Yard. I found the mistake which had been made about the tobacco. It made me very interested in your case. I feel sure we don't know the truth of it. If you can help me to that it's going to help you." He waited.

"The police can't help me," said Wilton. "I'm not going to say anything."

"My dear chap, I know that was a bad blunder. But there's more than that wants looking into. If you'll give us a chance we might be able to clear up the whole case and set you on your feet again. That's what I'm here for."

Wilton laughed. "No thanks," he said unpleasantly.

"Just think of it. I can't do you any harm. I'm looking for the truth. I'm on your side. What I want to know is, have you got any enemies?

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Anyone who might like to damage you? Anybody who wanted to put you out of the way?"

"Only the police," said Wilton.

Reggie brushed that away. "Did anything strange ever happen to you before this charge?"

"What?" Wilton flushed. "Oh, I see. I'm an old criminal, am I? Better look for my previous convictions. Or you can invent 'em. Quite easy."

"My dear chap, what good can this do you?" said Reggie sadly. "The police didn't invent this charge. Your friend Mr. Witt made it. Do you know anything about Mr. Witt? Did it ever occur to you he wanted you off the scene — in Dutch colonies — or in prison?"

"I've nothing against Witt," said Wilton.

"Oh, my dear fellow! How did the diamonds get in your room?"

"Yes, how did they?" said Wilton savagely. "Ask your police inspector. The man who said that was my tobacco. You're a policeman. You know how these jobs are done."

"I wish I did," Reggie sighed. "If I did I daresay you wouldn't be here."

But he could get no more out of Dr. Wilton. He went away sorrowful. He had not recovered his spirits when he sought Lomas next morning. Lomas was brisk. "You're the man I want. What's the convict's theory of it?"

Reggie shook his head. "Lomas, do I ever seem a little vain of my personal charm? The sort of fellow who thinks fellows can't resist him?"

"Nothing offensive, Fortune. A little childlike, perhaps. You do admire yourself, don't you?"

"Quoth the raven 'Nevermore.' When you find me feeling fascinating again, kindly murmur the name Wilton. I didn't fascinate him. Not one little damn. He was impossible."

"You surprise me," said Lomas gravely. "Nothing out of him at all?"

"Too much, too much," Reggie sighed. "Sullen, insolent, stupid — that was our young doctor, poor devil. It was the wicked police that did him in, a put-up job by the force, the inspector hid the diamonds in his room to spite him. Such was Dr. Horace Wilton, the common, silly criminal to the life. It means nothing, of course. The poor beggar's dazed. Like a child kicking the naughty chair that he fell over."

"I'm not so sure," said Lomas. "The inspector has shot himself, Fortune. We had him up here, you know, to inquire into the case. He was nervous and confused. He went back home and committed suicide." Reggie Fortune shivered in his chair. "Nothing against the man before. There's only this question of the tobacco against him now. But it looks ugly, doesn't it?"

"We know he said the tobacco was what it isn't. If that made him kill himself he was too conscientious for a policeman, poor beggar. Why does it look ugly, Lomas? I think it's pitiful. My God, if we all shot ourselves when we made mistakes, there would be vacancies in the force. Poor Wilton

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said the inspector put the diamonds in his room. But that's crazy."

"It's all crazy. You are a little confused yourself, Fortune. You say it's preposterous for the man to shoot himself merely because he made a mistake, and equally preposterous to suppose he had any other reason."

"Poor beggar," Reggie murmured. "No, Lomas, I'm not confused. I'm only angry. Wilton's not guilty and your inspector's not guilty. And one's in prison and one's dead, and we call ourselves policemen. Shutting the stable door after the horse's stolen, that's a policeman's job. But great heavens, we don't even shut the door."

Lomas shook his head. "Not only angry, I fear, but rattled. My dear Fortune, what can we do?"

"Witt hasn't shown his hand?"

"Not unless he had a hand in the inspector's suicide."

"I suppose it was suicide?"

"Well, you'd better look at the body. The evidence is good enough."

"Nothing in the papers?"

Lomas stared at him. "Columns, of course. All quite futile. You didn't expect any evidence in the papers?"

"You never know. You don't put a proper value on the Press, Lomas."

It has been remarked of Mr. Fortune that when he is interested he will do everything himself. This is considered by professional critics a weakness. Yet in this case of the young doctor, where he was continually occupied with details, he seems to have kept a clear head for strategy.

He went to see the inspector's body in the mortuary. He came out in gloomy thought.

"Satisfied, sir?" said Superintendent Bell, who escorted him.

Reggie stopped and stared at him. "Oh, Peter, what a word!" he muttered. "Satisfied! No, Bell, not satisfied. Only infuriated. He killed himself all right, poor beggar. One more victim for Witt and Company."

"What's the next move, sir?"

"Goodbye," said Mr. Fortune. "I'm going home to read the papers."

When all the London papers which had appeared since the news that there was a doubt about the justice of Wilton's conviction had been given them, he shut himself into his study. Most of them had taken the hint that there was a mystery in the case and made a lot of it. The more rational were content to tell the story in detail, pointing out the incongruity of such a man as Wilton and the crime. The more fatuous put out wild inventions as to the theories held by the police. But there was general sympathy with Dr. Wilton, a general readiness to expect that he would be cleared. He had a good press — except for the *Daily Watchman*.

The *Daily Watchman* began in the same strain as the rest of the papers, taking Wilton's innocence for granted and devising crazy explanations of the burglary. But on the third day it burst into a different tune. Under a full-page headline THE WILTON SCANDAL, its readers were warned against the manufactured agitation

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to release the man Wilton. It was a trick of politicians and civil servants and intellectuals to prevent the punishment of a rascally criminal. It was another case of one law for the rich and another for the poor. It was a corrupt job to save a scoundrel who had friends in high places. It was, in fine, all sorts of iniquity, and the British people must rise in their might and keep the wicked Wilton in jail if they did not want burglars calling every night.

Mr. Fortune went to sup at one of his clubs used by journalists. There he sought and at last found Simon Winterbottom, the queerest mixture of scholarship, slang, and backstairs gossip to be found in London. "Winter," said he, having stayed the man with flagons, "who runs the *Daily Watchman?*"

"My God!" Winterbottom was much affected. "Are you well, Reginald? Are you quite well? It's the wonkiest print on the market. All newspapers are run by madmen, but the *Watchman* merely dithers."

"You said 'on the market,'" Reggie repeated. "Corrupt?"

"Well, naturally. Too balmy to live honest. Why this moral fervor, Reginald? I know you're officially a guardian of virtue, but you mustn't let it weigh on your mind."

"I want to know why the *Watchman* changed sides on the Wilton case."

Winterbottom grinned. "That was a giddy stunt, wasn't it? I don't know, Reginald. Why ask for reasons? 'Let twenty pass and stone the twenty-first, loving not, hating not, just choosing so.'"

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "It's the sudden change of mind. This is rather a bad business, Winter."

"Oh, simian," Winterbottom agreed. His comical face was working. "You are taking it hard, Reginald."

"I'm thinking of that poor devil Wilton. Who got at the *Watchman*, old thing? I could bear to know."

On the next day Mr. Fortune received a letter.

> DEAR R.,
>
> Kemp who owns the *Watchman* came in one bright day, cancelled all instructions on the Wilton case, and dictated the new line. No known cause for the rash act. It leaks from his wretched intimates that Kemp has a new pal, one Kuyper, a ruffian said by some to be a Hun, certainly a City mushroom. This seems highly irrelevant. You must not expect Kemp to be rational even in his vices. Sorry.
>
> S. W.

Mr. Fortune went into the city and consumed turtle soup and oyster patties with Tommy Owen, the young son of an ancient firm of stockbrokers. When they were back again in the dungeon which is Tommy's office, "Thomas, do you know anything of one Kuyper?" he said.

"Wrong number, old bean," Tommy Owen shook his round head. "Not in my department. International finance is Kuyper's line."

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Reggie smiled. It is the foible of Tommy Owen to profess ignorance. "Big business?" he said.

"Not so much big business as queer business. Mr. Julius Kuyper blew into London some months ago. Yes, January. He is said to be negotiating deals in Russian mining properties."

"Sounds like selling gold bricks."

"Well, not in my department," said Tommy Owen again. "There's some money somewhere. Mr. Kuyper does the thing in style. He's thick with some fellows who don't go where money isn't. In point of fact, old dear, I've rather wondered about Mr. Kuyper. Do you know anything?"

"Nothing that fits, Tommy. What does he want in London?"

"Search me," said Tommy Owen. "I say, Fortune, when Russia went pop some blokes must have laid their hands on a lot of good stuff. I suppose you fellows at Scotland Yard know where it's gone?"

"I wonder if your friend Kuyper's been dealing in jewels."

Tommy Owen looked wary. "Don't that fit, old bean? There's a blighter that's been busy with brother Kuyper blossomed out with a rare old black pearl in his tiepin. They used to tell me the good black pearls went to Russia."

"What is Kuyper? A Hun?"

"I wouldn't bet on it. He might be anything. Lean beggar, oldish, trim little beard, very well groomed, talks English well, says he's a Dutchman. You could see him yourself. He has offices in that ghastly new block in Mawdleyn Lane."

"Thanks very much, Thomas," said Mr. Fortune.

"Oh, not a bit. Sorry I don't know anything about the blighter," said Owen, and Mr. Fortune laughed.

As a taxi took him home to Wimpole Street he considered his evidence. The mysterious Kuyper said he was Dutch. The vanished Witt also said he was Dutch. Kuyper said he was selling Russian jewels. Witt also dealt in jewels. Mr. Fortune went home and telephoned to Lomas that Julius Kuyper of Mawdleyn Lane should be watched, and by men of experience.

Even over the telephone the voice of Lomas expressed surprise. "Kuyper?" it repeated. "What is the reference, Fortune? The Wilton case. Quite so. You did say Julius Kuyper?"

Reggie also felt some surprise but he did not show it.

"Some of your men who've moved in good criminal society," he said firmly. "Rush it, old thing."

After breakfast on the next day but one he was going to the telephone to talk to Lomas when the thing rang at him. "Is that Fortune?" said Lomas's voice. "Speaking? The great Mr. Fortune! I looks towards you, Reginald. I likewise bows. Come right on."

Mr. Fortune found Lomas with Superintendent Bell. They lay back in their chairs and looked at him. Lomas started up, came to him and walked round him, eyeglass up.

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"What is this?" said Mr. Fortune.

"Admiration." Lomas sighed. "Reverence. Awe. How do you do these things, Fortune? You look only human, not to say childlike. Yet you have us all beat. You arrive while we're still looking for the way."

"I wouldn't have said it was a case for Mr. Fortune, either," said Bell.

"No flowers, by request. Don't be an owl, Lomas. Who is Kuyper?"

Lomas sat down again. "I hoped you were going to tell us that," he said. "What in the world made you go for Kuyper?"

"He calls himself Dutch and so did Witt. He deals in jewels and so did Witt. And I fancy he set the *Daily Watchman* howling that Wilton must stay in prison."

"And if you will kindly make sense of that for me I shall be obliged," said Lomas.

"It doesn't make sense. I know that. Hang it all, you must do something for yourselves. Justify your existence, Lomas. Who is Kuyper?"

"Reginald, all my apologies. None of our men recognized Kuyper. But one of them did recognize Mr. Witt. Mr. Witt is now something in Kuyper's office. Marvelous, Reginald. How do you do it?"

"My head," said Reggie Fortune. "Oh, my head! Kuyper's a political agent and Kuyper employs a man to put Wilton out of the way. It's a bad dream."

"Yes, it's not plausible. Not one of your more lucid cases, Fortune."

"I had thought," said Bell diffidently, "if Dr. Wilton happened to get to know of some political plot, they would be wanting to put him out."

"They would — in a novel," Reggie shook his head. "But somehow I don't fancy Kuyper, Witt and Co. I think I'll go and have a little talk with the firm."

"You?" Lomas stared at him.

"Not alone, I reckon, sir." Bell stood up.

"Well, you come and chaperon me. Yes, I want to look at 'em, Lomas. Wilton's a medical man, you know. I want to see the patients, too."

"You can try it," Lomas said dubiously. "You realize we have nothing definite against Witt, and nothing at all against Kuyper. And I'm not sure that Kuyper hasn't smelled a rat. He's been staying at the Olympian. He was there on Tuesday night, but last night our men lost him."

"Come on, Bell," said Mr. Fortune.

Outside the big new block in Mawdleyn Lane, Superintendent Bell stopped a moment and looked round. A man crossed the road and made a sign as he vanished into a doorway.

"He's in, sir," Bell said, and they went up to the offices of Mr. Julius Kuyper.

A pert young woman received them. They wanted to see Mr. Kuyper? By appointment? Oh, Mr. Kuyper never saw anyone except by appointment.

"He'll see me," said Bell, and gave her a card. She looked him over impudently and vanished. Another

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young woman peered round the glass screen at them.

"Sorry." The first young woman came briskly back. "Mr. Kuyper's not in. Better write and ask for an appointment."

"That won't do. Who is in?" said Bell heavily.

"Don't you bully me!" she cried.

"You don't want to get into trouble, do you?" Bell frowned down at her. "You go in there and say Superintendent Bell is waiting to see Mr. Witt."

"We haven't got any Mr. Witt."

"You do as you're told."

She went. She was gone a long time. A murmur of voices was audible. She came out again, looking flustered. "Well, what about it?" said Bell.

"I don't know anything about it," she said. A door slammed, a bell rang. She made a nervous exclamation and turned to answer it. Bell went first and Reggie on his heels.

In the inner room an oldish man stood smoothing his hair. He was flushed and at the sight of Bell he cried out: "But you intrude, sir."

"Ah, here's our old friend, Mr. Witt," Bell smiled. "I should —"

"There is some mistake. You are wrong, sir. What is your name? Mr. Superintendent — my name is Siegel."

"I daresay it is. Then why did you call yourself Witt?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"I don't forget faces. I should know you anywhere. You're the Mr. Witt who prosecuted Dr. Horace Wilton. Come, come, the game's up now."

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"Time to tell the truth," said Reggie sweetly, "time you began to think of yourself, isn't it? We know all about the evidence in the Wilton burglary. Why did you do it, Mr. Witt? It wasn't safe, you know."

"What do you want?"

"Well, where's your friend Mr. Kuyper? We had better have him in."

"Mr. Kuyper has gone out, sir."

Reggie laughed. "Oh, I don't think so. You're not doing yourself justice. What is Mr. Kuyper's little game with you?"

Mr. Witt looked nervously round the room. "You — you mustn't — I mean we can't talk here," he said. "The girls will be listening."

"Oh, send the girls out to tea," said Bell.

"No. I can't do that. I had rather come with you, Mr. Superintendent."

"Come on then."

Mr. Witt, who was shaking with nervous fear, caught up his hat and coat. The farther door of the room was flung open. Two pistol shots were fired. As Reggie sprang at the door it was slammed in his face and locked. Mr. Witt went down in a heap. Bell dashed through the outer office into the corridor. Reggie knelt by Mr. Witt. "Kuyper," Mr. Witt gasped. "Kuyper."

"I know. We'll get him yet. Where's he gone?"

"His yacht," Mr. Witt gasped. "Yacht at Gravesend. He had it ready." He groaned and writhed. He

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was hit in the shoulder and stomach.

Reggie did what he could for the man, and went to the telephone. He had finished demanding an ambulance when Bell came back breathless, with policemen in uniform at his heels.

"The swine," Bell gasped. "He's off, sir. Must have gone down the other staircase into Bull Court. We had a man there but he wouldn't know there was anything up, he'd only follow. Pray God he don't lose him. They lost him last night."

"Send these girls away," said Mr. Fortune. "Let the constables keep the door. I want to use the telephone." And when the ambulance had come and taken Mr. Witt, happily unconscious at last, to the hospital, he was still talking into the telephone. "Is that clear?" he concluded. "All right. Goodbye." He hung up the receiver. "Come on, Bell. It's Gravesend now. This is our busy day."

"Gravesend?" The superintendent stared.

But it was into a teashop that Reggie plunged when they reached the street. He came out with large paper bags just as a big car turned into Mawdleyn Lane. "Good man," he smiled upon the chauffeur. "Gravesend police station. And let her out when you can." With his mouth full he expounded to Superintendent Bell his theory of the evasion of Mr. Kuyper.

As the car drew up in Gravesend a man in plain clothes came out of the police station. "Scotland Yard, sir?" Bell pulled a card out. "Inspector's down on the beach now. I was to take you to him."

By the pier the inspector was waiting. He hurried up to their car. "Got him?" said Bell.

"He's off. You didn't give us much time. But he's been here. A man answering to your description hired a motor yacht — cutter with auxiliary engine — six weeks ago. It was rather noticed, being an unusual time of year to start yachting. He's been down odd times and slept aboard. He seems to have slept aboard last night. I can't find anyone who's seen him here today. But there's a longshoreman swears he saw a Tilbury boat go alongside the *Cyrilla* — that's his yacht — a while since, and the *Cyrilla's* away."

"Have you got a fast boat ready for us?"

"At the pier head, sir. Motor launch."

"Good work," Reggie smiled. And they hurried on board.

"What's the job, sir?" The captain of the launch touched his cap.

"Dig out after the *Cyrilla*. You know her, don't you?"

"I do, but I reckon she ain't in sight. What's the course?"

"Downstream. She'll be making for the Dutch coast. Are you good for a long run?"

"Surely. And I reckon it will be a long run. She's fast, is *Cyrilla*. Wind her up, Jim," and the launch began to throb through the water.

Mr. Fortune retired under the hood and lit his pipe, and Bell followed him. "He's smart, isn't he, sir,

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our Mr. Kuyper? His yacht at Gravesend and he comes down by Tilbury. That's neat work."

"Don't rub it in, Bell. I know I ought to have thought of Tilbury."

Bell stared at him. "Good Lord, Mr. Fortune, I'm not blaming you, sir."

"I am," said Reggie. "It's an untidy case, Bell. Well, well. I wonder if I've missed anything more?"

"I don't know what you've missed, sir. I know I wouldn't like to be on the run if you were after me."

Reggie looked at the large man with a gleam of amusement. "It would be rather joyful, Bell," he chuckled, and was solemn again. "No. I am not happy. I want Mr. Kuyper."

It was a gray day. The Essex flats lay dim and sombre. The lights on the southern shore were blurred. Yet they could see far out to the Nore. An east wind was whipping the flood tide into tiny waves, through which the launch clove, making, after the manner of her kind, a great show of speed, leaving the tramps that chunked outward bound as though they lay at anchor.

"Do you see her yet?" Reggie asked the captain.

"Maybe that's her," he pointed to a dim line on the horizon beyond the lightship. "Maybe not." He spat over the side.

"Are you gaining on her?"

"I reckon we're coming up, sir."

"What's that thing doing?" Reggie pointed to a long low black craft near the Nore.

"Destroyer, sir. Engine's stopped."

"Run down to her, will you? How does one address the Navy, Bell? I feel shy. Ask him if he's the duty destroyer of the Nore Command, will you?"

"Good Lord, sir," said Bell.

The captain of the launch hailed. "Duty destroyer, sir?"

"Aye, aye. Scotland Yard launch? Come alongside."

"Thank God for the Navy, as the soldier said," Mr. Fortune murmured. "Perhaps it will be warmer on board her."

"I say, sir, did you order a destroyer out?"

"Oh, I asked Lomas to turn out the Navy. I thought we might want 'em."

Superintendent Bell gazed at him. "And you say you forget things," he said. "Witt's shot and all in a minute you have all this in your head."

They climbed a most unpleasant ladder. A young lieutenant received them. "You gentlemen got a job of work for us?"

"A motor yacht, cutter rig, name *Cyrilla*, left Gravesend an hour or two ago, probably making for the Dutch coast. There's a man on board that's badly wanted."

"Can do." The lieutenant smiled and ran up to the bridge. "Starboard five. Half ahead both." He spoke into a voice pipe. "You'd better come up here," he called to them. "We'll whack her up as we go."

The destroyer began to quiver gently to the purr of the turbines.

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Reggie cowered under the wind screen. The speed grew and grew, and the destroyer sat down on her stern and on either side white waves rushed from the high sharp bow. "Who is your friend on the yacht?" the lieutenant smiled.

"His last is attempted murder. But that was only this morning."

The lieutenant gave it up and again asked for more speed and began to use his binoculars. "There's a cutter rig," he pointed.

The destroyer came up fast. A white hull was revealed to the naked eye. The lieutenant spoke to his signalman and flags fluttered above the bridge. "Not answered. D'ye think your friend'll put up a scrap?"

"I daresay he will, if his crew will stand for it."

"Will they have any arms?" asked the lieutenant.

"Pistols, likely," said Bell.

"Well! She is *Cyrilla*." He picked up a megaphone and roared through it. "*Cyrilla!* Stop your engine!"

There was some movement on the yacht's deck. She did stop her engine or slow. A shot was heard. She started her engine again and again stopped. A man ran aft and held up his hand. The destroyer drew abeam and the lieutenant said what occurred to him of yachts which did not obey Navy signals. There was no answer. A little knot of men on the *Cyrilla* gazed at the destroyer.

Behind the destroyer's sub-lieutenant Bell and Reggie came to the yacht's deck. "Where's the captain? Don't you know enough to read signals?" the sub-lieutenant began.

"Where's Mr. Kuyper?" said Bell.

"We didn't understand your signals, sir." The captain licked his lips. "Don't know anything about a Mr. Kuyper. We've got a Mr. Hotten, a Dutch gentleman. He's my owner."

"Where is he?"

"Down the engine room. It was him fired at the engineer to make him start her up again when I 'ad stopped. I laid him out with a spanner."

A slim spruce body was laid on the deck, precisely the Julius Kuyper of Tommy Owen's description. Reggie knelt down beside him.

"He ain't dead, is he?" said the yacht's captain anxiously.

But the stertorous breath of Mr. Kuyper could be heard. "My only aunt," Reggie muttered.

"What's the matter, sir?"

"Man hasn't got a heart. This is very unusual. Good Lord! Heart well over on the right side. Heterotaxy very marked. Quite unusual. Ah! That's more to the point. He's had an operation on the thyroid gland. Yes. Just so." He smiled happily.

"What was that word you said, sir?"

"Heterotaxy? Oh, it only means he's got his things all over on the wrong side."

"Then I know him!" Bell cried. "I thought I knew the look of him, as old as he is now. It's Lawton, sir, Lawton of the big bank frauds. He

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went off with a hundred thousand or more. Before your time, but you must have heard. A clear getaway."

"And that's that," said Reggie. "Now we know."

Some days afterwards the Hon. Sidney Lomas called on Mr. Fortune, who was at the moment making a modest supper of deviled sole. "Did you clear it up?" he said.

"Well, Lawton got clean away after his bank frauds, as you know —"

"I know all about Lawton. He lived on the plunder in Holland as Adrian Hotten and flourished, till the war. Then he lost most of his money backing Germany to win. In the end of 1917 he went off to Russia. This year he turned up in London as Julius Kuyper, talking about Russian mines and selling Russian jewels."

"Quite so. Well, in February he was in a motor accident in Cavendish Square. A lorry hit his car and he was thrown out and stunned. The unfortunate Wilton was passing and gave him first-aid, and discovered that his heart was on the wrong side. He came to under Wilton's hands. I suppose Wilton showed a little too much interest. Anyhow, Mr. Kuyper saw that the malformation which would identify him as Lawton of the bank frauds was known to the young doctor. Well, he kept his head then. He was very grateful. He asked for Wilton's card. And Wilton never heard any more of him. But Wilton was interested in this striking case of heterotaxy. He noted the number of the car, found the garage from which it was hired, and went round to ask who the man was. They wouldn't tell him, but the chauffeur, I suppose, told Mr. Kuyper the doctor was asking after him. He sent Witt to take a flat over Wilton's and find out what Wilton was up to. I take it Mr. Kuyper was doing mighty good business in London and didn't want to run away. He needn't have bothered — but that's the man all over, brilliantly ingenious and no judgment. That thyroid of his! Wilton had come to know the local detective-inspector, that poor chap who committed suicide. I'm mighty sorry for that fellow, Lomas. He was so keen against Wilton because he was afraid of not doing his duty when he liked the man — and then he found he'd blundered into giving false evidence against his friend. I don't wonder he chose to die."

"Conscience makes fools of us all," said Lomas.

"Yes. Poor beggar. And no wonder Wilton was bitter against him. Well, Kuyper decided that Wilton with his curiosity and his friend in the police wasn't safe at large. First they tried to ship him out of the country and he wouldn't go. So they put up the burglary. I suppose Witt or Witt's friend the sham Dutch journalist is a Hun. That accounts for the superfluous clues — the Rauch-tabak and the German keys. An able man, Kuyper. If only his thyroid had been healthy!"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Raphael Hayes's "The Man Who Could Not Die" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. It was one of the very few supernatural or fantastic tales submitted in 1952. We think you will find it compelling in a poetically sensitive way, and perhaps disturbing — in the sense that it will stir and disturb your imagination.

The author comes from a literary family. His mother still remembers getting A's for composition in her London school. His brother is Alfred Hayes, who wrote GIRL ON THE VIA FLAMINIA. *Raphael himself began as a poet, and some of his poetry appeared in Poetry Magazine and The New Republic many years ago. At the time he submitted "The Man Who Could Not Die," Raphael Hayes was hard at work on a novel, while earning his living as a free-lance writer in TV.*

There isn't much more that the reticent Mr. Hayes has told us. He is in his early thirties, married, and has a young fullback for a son. His work past has been the typical patchwork quilt of so many writers who are willing to do anything to make ends meet, so long as they have some spare time to peck away at their heart's desire. Mr. Hayes has been a grocery clerk, a traveling salesman, a worker in a steel mill, a staff member at AP . . . and one of these days he will begin writing stories about a grocery clerk or a traveling salesman or a worker in a mill — and that will be the day!

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT DIE

by RAPHAEL HAYES

HE STOOD BY THE MIRROR IMpassively watching his fingers work the black ribbon into a bow-tie, his mind vaguely flickering with memories of cravats, stocks, ruffs, and golden chains. But this hardly mattered any more. So much accompanied him by now that such memories were like the usual familiar buzzing of flying things about one on a summer night.

He could hear Maria . . . No. Mary. His image in the glass smiled faintly. He could hear Mary dressing in the next room.

Again the flickering of memories . . . Rome . . . Paris . . . Byzantium . . . and the dry rustling sound

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of skirts. Maria. Marie. Margarita. Mary. And then, all at once, there was the pain. The sharp drawing across the chest, like the sudden tightening of Time.

"John!"

He turned. "Yes?"

"Come hook me up!"

He crossed the room. The memories were what weighed on him, most of all. The dresses hooked, the slippers tied, the mantles helped on . . . the memories of an eternal gentleman, husband, gallant cavalier . . .

Mary stood, holding her gown up in front, revealing a rich whiteness of shoulder and a shadowed curve of back where the gown hung open.

"These gowns are planned only for women with husbands," she laughed, "or for those with lovers handy all the time."

"Which makes you doubly lucky." He kissed her shoulder.

She pressed against him for a moment, her face small and cameo-perfect, framed in dark shining hair.

"Hooks," she said, finally pulling away, "not kisses. Otherwise we'll be late at the McIvers."

"Newly married couples are always expected to be late. People understand." His fingers were expert . . . Rome . . . Paris . . . Byzantium . . .

"Newly married! Why, it's ages!"

His fingers froze. "What?"

"Three months! That's ages already!"

"Oh. Yes," he said, "yes."

When he was done she went to the mirror and combed her hair. Above her shoulder he could see his image in the glass — the great head with its features that had reminded Dr. McIver of classic Roman busts — of that look of power and authority, cut from some granite impossible to erode.

This . . . this was the look he had carried up through time, carried up always to such a moment as this, where some woman stood, combing her dark and shining hair in slow sweeps. But how could it have been otherwise? All other means of escape had failed.

"John," Mary said. In the mirror he could see that her face was unexpectedly serious, troubled.

"Yes?"

"I had a strange dream again last night."

He turned her quickly toward him. "What about?" he asked, tense.

"About a city."

"What city?"

"I don't know." Her brow creased, trying to remember. "There was a street, narrow, cramped — like . . . like in medieval drawings. You know, those old cities. And there were people walking in capes, strange costumes. What do you call them? Doublets? There was a duel. A tall man. He . . ." and her eyes widened in surprise, "why he looked exactly like you! His hair was longer, John. But the face was the same . . ."

Again the hope died. This was what he had told her last night while she slept. Prague, 1612. The Magyar who had interfered between him and the girl, and the short, bloody violence

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erupting in the torch's flare. Still his *own* memories. So far to travel yet — before the one he longed for might be dislodged! That is, if it was here at all . . . or anywhere.

"Now why should I dream a thing like that?" Mary was saying.

"I don't know. Unless . . ." He left it hanging and walked into his own room to get his jacket.

"Unless what?" she asked when he returned.

"Unless it's because you're married to a professor of ancient languages. A kind of osmosis."

"Could be," and she frowned. "It could very well be!"

The look of astonishment came quickly upon his face with . . . boudoir . . . chamber . . . palazzio. "Don't tell me you're getting superstitious?"

She started to say something and stopped as though an unexpected uneasiness had caught her mind. "I don't know," she finally said. "How can you tell about these things? This isn't the first time I dreamed . . ."

And standing there with the troubled uncertain look upon her face, it struck him as sharply as it had the first time, how much she looked like the girl in Zara. Marja . . . from whom the curse was born . . . because of whom this weight of time and guilt was mountainous upon his shoulders.

"John!"

Johann. Jean. Giovanni. Juan. The names all rose in her cry. Dear God, let it happen this time! Let him hear, feel, be touched by forgiveness at last. There were no other needs left.

"John!" she called again.

"What?"

"The time! Look! We're already late!"

They rushed out, got a cab, and after a while were driving past the University buildings. At Dr. McIver's house they were enthusiastically greeted at the door.

"John! Mary!" McIver, tall, with a thin gangling frame, took their coats. "Harriet was ready to send out an alarm. She's been wailing about her dinner being spoiled!"

"That's not true!" Mrs. McIver came toward them, a short compact woman with a decisive air. "Henry always has to make things sound dramatic. Come, the table's laid."

After dinner they sat and talked, McIver leaning eagerly forward, his tall bony frame looking, as usual, uncomfortable in the restrictions of a chair.

The faculty archeologist, John thought, an eager digger of dust and stones, a searcher after ruins, and here, mankind's foremost ruin in his very living room! He, John, was more bleached pillar or broken arch than any the doctor had ever reached with pick and spade.

"It was the most astonishing thing!" the doctor was exclaiming. "We were not far from Perugia — walking — not a field trip, mind you. Singing away at the top of our lungs. In fact, Harriet was practicing some Italian songs. That's exactly what we were

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doing — on a lark — when I stumbled into it. The most marvelous Etruscan tomb I'd ever seen, right on that hillside!"

"Wonderful," he said dutifully, thinking that he, too, in a way, was a digger, only not for ruins. He sifted through the debris of humanity, through Bulgar, Frenchman, Mongol, Ottoman, Lombard, Norman, through the wreckage of war, disease, catastrophe, through the rubble of shattered memory, for a most perfect thing. Forgiveness. Upon this discovery rested all that mattered. He almost thought all that mattered in the world. But no. All that mattered in Time.

His gaze wandered to the corner of the room where Mary sat with Harriet McIver, the older woman talking in quick, hurried bursts, and then stopping and watching, bright-eyed, while Mary replied. His gaze fixed on Mary's profile. How many times had he searched for just such a face, seeking for it as some desperately seek for salvation? And all at once it was Zara...

And the brilliantly caparisoned steeds of the French Barons reared in clouds of dust, mouths foaming, eyes starting from their sockets, while the Cathedral Square rang with steel and death and the French cry of "Boniface! Boniface!" An abruptly churning world where the sun had glowed and pigeons had strutted — now a city bloodily split open.

And then, later, the sack and pillage by the victorious crusaders, already excommunicated by Innocent in Rome for their treacherous blow against the Christian city of Zara on the Adriatic, Venice's maritime rival. And the piling up of loot left for the soft, cunning Venetians to assay.

And himself, Johann, the student, enthralled by the splendor of the French barons, by their armor chased with gold; by the glitter of stones upon their fingers, the chains heavy with medallions about their throats, and he seeking them out while his own city still smoked with their looting and rapine.

He craved their glory! To be one of these, upon the high, heroic adventure to Jerusalem! And because they read shining in his face their magnificence and triumph, they tolerated him. He poured their wine, laughed with them when the women were dragged screaming into the inner chambers, and then, to win their praise, he told them Marja's name, and led them to where she hid.

The Barons, drunk, their savage faces crowding into the room, their eyes all lust, and Marja . . . his betrothed . . . looking up startled, then paling.

"What is it, Johann? What is it?"

And then the young girl's terrifying scream . . .

It still reached across time, piercingly.

"John! John!"

He came awake galvanically. "What?"

"You were dozing!" McIver's hand was upon his knee. "I was telling you all about my wonderful Etruscan tomb, and you dreaming away!"

"Was I?" The ancient faces moved confusedly about him as though strug-

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gling to fade away. "I . . . I didn't . . . Sorry, Henry. I'm tired, I guess."

McIver slapped his knee and laughed. "Dr. Sanders, a drink is what you need!" And McIver rose and went across the room.

He watched his host's long body and then he was no longer seeing McIver. It was himself, Johann, still alive! Marja's grave turned to weed, the stone piece shattered, the very spot of burial lost — and he still alive!

In the beginning there had been no fear. In the beginning there were only curious remarks — "You do not age, Johann! Look, you would not think he has been among us for 50 years!"

And then the sudden awareness that while contemporaries withered and died, this man remained ruddy and young. And finally one morning, the cry from the steps of Notre Dame as he walked across the great square: "Accursed! Devil's pawn! He is accursed!"

That evening he fled and on the road to Rome faced the thing that had been a repressed terror within himself for years. How long since he had heard her screams? Seventy-five — a hundred years? Was it true? Could he not die?

On the road to Rome he discovered that he could not die. The dagger left only flesh wounds. The poisons turned harmless, and smoke, fire, beasts mysteriously recoiled from him. Death was withheld.

Rome. Athens. The cities of Bude and Peste. Again Paris. Iberia. Wales. Seeking the practitioners of magic, of secret cults. But none could bring him release. Time bore him mercilessly on. And he was left with the single, tenuous hope that perhaps the betrayed soul of Marja would return and he might find among the world's millions the ancient soul from which to beg forgiveness. His only clue . . . a face that recalled a girl in Zara . . .

"Here you are!" McIver said. "I hope they're what I intended making." He laughed and handed John his drink.

"John," McIver abruptly said, "do you mind if I ask you something? It's sort of personal, I know, but I'm curious and a little bit sentimental, too."

"What?"

"About you and Mary." He sat down. "How did you meet? Harriet and I met at an extraordinarily dull lecture during post-graduate work . . ."

"An accident," he said calmly. "An art gallery and two lonely people. Isn't it curious that all lonely people gravitate toward the city? The biggest and loneliest place of all?"

McIver chuckled. "You know, I've a theory about such things — meetings, that is. Fate always brings the right people together, and you two were certainly made for each other."

Let it be true, God. Let it be true.

"Just like Harriet and me." McIver raised his glass in tribute. "A most wonderful and remarkable woman!"

As they drank, Mrs. McIver said in a suddenly loud and emphatic voice, "My, what a curious thing!"

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They turned. She was staring at Mary.

"What is, my dear?" McIver said.

"Mary!" She spoke as though unsure about the quality of her own surprise. "For the past fifteen minutes she's been telling me the most incredible things . . . about Paris . . ."

"Harriet, please!" Mary flushed uneasily. She touched the other woman's arm.

"We were talking about clothes," Mrs. McIver went undeterredly on, "and all at once Mary was talking about robes, mantles, fashions in Eighteenth Century Paris, telling about them as though they were things she would be wearing today!"

"But, Harriet, I told you I don't remember . . ."

"That's it! That's the amazing thing! All at once Mary stops and picks up where we left off, and when I question her, she has absolutely no memory of talking about Paris!"

"Well, I'll be!" McIver glanced quickly at John. But he made no move. No gesture.

"And the other day! Of course!" Mrs. McIver clapped her hands. "Only Thursday! Just a sentence or two that Mary said when we met on the street corner, something about tumbrels rolling past. I paid no attention because I thought it was a joke. Tumbrels! Imagine! That's back 150 years ago!"

"John!" It was McIver. "Has Mary been doing this often?"

Before he answered he looked at her. She was frightened now. And he knew the fright was not for them, but for herself. It had begun. The lapses, the gaps during which they talked of things they'd never seen. His words, whispered at night, being spoken during the day. But what else could he have done?

"She has been having strange dreams."

"About what?"

He knew her eyes were upon him, a silent, pathetic appeal of "Don't, John. Don't tell them."

If only he was someone else in a different time and not what he was, repeating betrayal upon betrayal. He forced the words out:

"I don't know. Things about medieval towns and streets . . ."

"Astonishing!" McIver spoke softly, as though this was another Etruscan tomb discovered. "Recapitulation of the past! Racial memory!"

"Perhaps." He brought the warm smile to his face. "Though Mary and I guess it's merely the result of living with a professor of ancient languages."

"You know, I've read about that somewhere." It was impossible to shake McIver from his fascination now. "A case somewhere. Yes! Of course! Schilling's *Collected Fantasy and Dream Life!* It's in my room. Just a minute, I'll get it."

"John," it was from Mary, "John, let's go home, please."

She was extraordinarily pale, standing small, her arms straight against her body, looking like someone caught by a mob. "I . . . I don't feel well."

"Idiot!" Mrs. McIver savagely

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grabbed her husband's arm as he hurried by. "Can't you see you've frightened the poor girl? Looking her up in case histories! Indeed! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

An enormous chagrin spread over McIver's face.

"Good heavens! I didn't mean . . . No! Believe me, absolutely no!" He turned, clumsily apologetic. "You understand, John. I wouldn't for the world . . ."

"Please, John. Let's go home."

He raised the body he bore and had a sense of effortlessly gliding past towers, citadels, belfries, and spires.

"Of course, dear. Could we have our coats, Harriet?"

"I can't say I blame you one bit," Mrs. McIver said sharply as she strode toward the hall closet.

"Forgive me, John. I can't let you go until . . ."

"It's all right, Henry. I understand."

And then he was helping her into her coat, she silent, her face still with its uneasy, frightened look, he calm and poised. How many such departures had he performed before?

"Good night," he said at the door.

"Good night, John. And Mary . . ." Mrs. McIver took her arm, "I'm awfully sorry that it had to . . ." And all at once she stopped. Her voice sharpened. "Mary! What's the matter?"

He turned quickly. Her face had gone strangely blank and unseeing, and he knew that it had happened again. She had slipped back.

"*Bueno notte*," Mary said tonelessly as if speaking beyond them to some vast, further distance. "*Addio Messer Guido. Addio Donna Lucrezia. Ci rivedremo, Dio volente.*"

And then the blank look was gone. She gazed at them for a moment, and then seeing their shock and surprise, her eyes widened.

"John," she whispered, "take me home!"

He got her downstairs and hailed a cab. As they climbed in, he said: "Drive fast."

Later at home, she lay in her bed, her dark hair shining on the white pillow, her eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Something's the matter with me, John. Something . . ."

"It's nothing, dear. You're simply upset."

"I'm ill!"

"Don't be silly," wishing she would shut her eyes, let go of this world, sink into the shapeless one wherein the soul turned slowly, unguarded and abandoned. Sleep! But she would not let go of the moorings of sight, sound, and thought.

"I'm not well, John."

"Ssshhhh . . . sleep."

He sat beside her, holding her shoulders. Did the French barons find Marja's so warm?

"I'll go to a doctor tomorrow. You'll find me one, John. A good one. You will, won't you?"

He stood up. Doctor!

"Of course, dear. First thing in the morning," he said, striding into the bathroom. He took the box of pills

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from the medicine cabinet, filled a glass of water, and returned.

"Here, take this. You'll rest."

She took it without question and afterward she reached up, gripped his arms, and said, "John, I'm terribly afraid."

"Sleep . . . sleep," he whispered.

And in a little while she shut her eyes.

He let only the night lamp glow beside her. In its light he looked upon the blind and perfect mask through which he would reach down to what might be buried in its farthest darkness, curled up like an infant waiting eternally to be reborn. To recall a soul to itself, to its power of forgiveness.

"Dear God," he begged, "let it be hers I've found at last . . ."

Taking her hand, he bent close . . . and the memories that illuminated that ancient time, rose within him . . . "Florence," he began, "and the air May-sweet and mild. And the boats on the Arno and the Festival . . . the representation of Hell. Remember . . . remember . . ." whispering his memory tensely. "I, Giovanni, and Maria . . . warm and gay with love. While the bright throng crowded onto the Ponte Alla Carraia, to watch the devils and the demons rowing up the glittering Arno to do mock battle with the angelic host.

"And the kindly Franciscan monk who blessed our youth and love . . . Remember . . . remember . . . I still fresh upon my search, sure that it was Maria, pressed against her in the shouting, singing, laughing crowd upon the bridge. How the silver-bedecked angelic host gleamed and sparkled in the May morning! How the monstrous devils danced and leaped in their boats! And then, all at once, the sharp and terrifying crack! And the Ponte Alla Carraia's riverward plunge! The screams! The horror! And I, thrashing about in the water, surrounded by frantic devils, crying 'Maria! Maria!' Seeing my first hope, struggling, her arms wildly clutching at the air, and then finally the watery nothing of the Arno.

" 'Maria! Maria!' I wept upon the banks later. Maria drowned and I, alive, saved by devils, demons, the enemies of God!"

And suddenly across the face before him there stabbed a look of agony and pain.

"Marja!" he cried, forgetting that it was not Marja, but Mary. He gripped her hand tightly. "Marja! Marja!"

And then, "John! John!"

He came violently awake. "John!" A man's voice distantly calling, "John!" and then a knocking on the door. "John!" The knob was rattling.

He half ran through the apartment and when he opened the door, McIver was standing there without a hat and carrying a book beneath his arm.

"For a moment I thought no one was home. May I come in?" He spoke in crisp, purposeful tones.

"Of course."

McIver entered, glancing rapidly about him.

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"Where's Mary?"

"Asleep."

There was something wrong. It was as if they had never been friends. He heard himself saying:

"What is it, Henry?"

McIver turned and looked at him without warmth.

"Something I don't understand. Who are you?"

"You know," he showed surprise, "John Sanders."

"Are you?" McIver's gaze did not waver. "Then who is Juan Sandoz? Giovanni Sandevelli? Jean Sandair? Maria? Margarita? Marie?"

And then McIver was stumbling backwards and John was aware of striding toward the man.

"Don't!" McIver was fumbling at his pocket. "I've got a gun."

He stopped. "Why? To shoot me?" He almost laughed.

"No. To get Mary out of here."

"What?"

"To get Mary out of here," McIver repeated. "My wife has gone to get Dr. Stetson of the University medical faculty. He should be here soon."

He grew instantly rigid. No! Not now! They must not come now, not when perhaps he was so close. He made a tremendous effort.

"You have no right to do this. You're meddling. After all, Mary is my wife."

"Weren't the others?" McIver was holding the gun awkwardly as though he was not altogether sure whom it might hit. "Read it." He tossed the book across the intervening space with his hand. "Page 197. *Schilling's Collection of Authenticated Fantasy and Dream Life.* I mentioned it. Remember?"

But he did not pick it up. He had to get back inside with her. All these centuries, and now, perhaps release in but a few minutes more!

"All right. I'll tell you then," McIver was saying. "I thought there was only one case of which Mary reminded me. But there happen to be three recorded. All with variations on the same name, John Sanders. And in each case reported, each woman exhibits the same symptoms . . . memories of the past. Not the past of yesterday . . . but the past of centuries. Maria Sandevelli, 1891. Marie Sandair, 1904. Margarita Sandoz, 1922. In each case the husband's name following a pattern. Giovanni. Jean. Juan."

He paused and then carefully, as if to make the words live longer, he said: "Each one of the women was eventually committed to a mental institution, raving about the past!"

But what did he care about these others now? Those who had not shown the final sign, who had drawn him close because of a face and a name that recalled the girl in Zara. These were the ones with whom he had failed. These, and others — Marta, Magda, Mariette . . . others long before there had been such books or records of any kind.

"Maybe this is meddling," McIver went on doggedly, "I don't know.

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But the names, the symptoms, and then the antiquated Italian. I heard it and I saw the look on her face. All right . . ." and McIver's voice rose as though he was beginning to be trapped in a kind of hysteria, "all right, it doesn't make sense. 1891! That's 60 years ago, and you look no more than 35. It isn't rational. It's scientifically impossible . . . all right. But nonetheless blunders, stupidities, meddling can be forgiven — but not tragedies . . . never the tragedies! Mary must be gotten away from here while there is still time."

"No!" Sanders's voice boomed and the gun in McIver's hand jerked up.

"No! Not now!" He filled his mind with the image of Mary's sleeping face . . . lips, closed eyes, white forehead, and pitchblack hair. She had shown a sign. "No! No!"

And then suddenly he heard a hurried mounting up the stairs.

"It's Stetson!" McIver moved toward the door.

But he moved more quickly, grabbed at the lock, shot it home, and then turning with his back barricading the door, he cried:

"Zara! Zara!"

From the bedroom there came a sudden piercing scream. He leaped away from the door and ran. Behind him, McIver rushed into the room.

Mary was writhing on the bed when they reached her, struggling beneath the blanket, her eyes shut, her face contorted with hate and pain . . . her arms threshing wildly about, striking the air, crying, "No! No!"

"Mary! Mary, wake up!" McIver, his face gray with panic, bent to shake her. "Wake up!"

"Don't!" He gripped McIver's arm and flung him violently backwards. "Don't!"

All was judgment now, all epic decision. While McIver moaned, half-stunned against the wall, he watched her with a wild glare. The blanket had slumped to the floor now, and in a wild disorder of sheets she fought and strained, striving to break free of some invisible weight, her body arching and twisting.

"Johann! . . . Johann!" her anguished face cried, her eyes tightly shut, locking in the nightmare. "Johann!"

His name!

"Help! Help!" In the ancient tongue the words cried out at him. "Help, Johann, don't let them do this to me, Johann!"

But there could be no help, for it was already done. He stood there while the French barons ripped her clothes, while her screams tore at the room. He stood there while the murderous thing happened.

"Cursed be you, Johann!" Her head was rocking back and forth as though there was no strength left to fight any more.

"Cursed be you! Walk in torment all the days! Suffer! Suffer! Suffer!"

And all at once she was still . . .

He gripped her shoulders. It could not end now. There was the blessing, the peace, the pardon yet to come. It was for forgiveness he had searched. Dimly he was aware of the banging

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on the front door and from the corner of his eye he saw McIver stagger from the room.

"Marja," he shook her, "it is I, Johann! Forgive me, Marja . . . Marja, whose pilgrimage has been longer than mine? Forgive me, Marja. Forgive me!"

He heard the front door being flung open and then McIver's shouting and then others answering his cries.

"Marja!" Again, frantically, he shook her inert body. Was he still to be left with all the wreckage and human injury he had committed in time? "Forgive me, Marja! Forgive me!"

Abruptly, as though a spring had been touched, she opened her eyes. In their unexpectedly clear and unimpeded depths he saw her love.

"*Forgiven,*" *she said.* "*Forgiven, Johann . . . forgiven!*"

For an instant he was seized with an acute longing to live out one life as others lived out theirs . . . with a home . . . with children . . . seeing something vigorous and splendid grow from their being together . . . But there was a sudden darkening within him as of a light plunging swiftly, silently down a giant tunnel . . . and then there was nothing, not even a sense of his own dust . . .

Nothing . . . no sign . . . no evidence of disintegration. Where a man had once stood beside a bed, now there was emptiness. But on the bed a girl lay rigid, eyes shut, mouthing the words of an ancient tongue. It was Dr. McIver who recognized the Latin phrases of the Prayer for the Dead.

When it was over the girl opened her eyes.

"Who are you?" she said, looking at them with some astonishment. "Who are you?"

Neither the McIvers nor Dr. Stetson could ever make her understand . . .

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One of Francis Quarles's meatiest investigations . . .

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE SCILLIES

by JULIAN SYMONS

IN LATE SPRING THERE IS A PECULIAR translucent quality in the light on the Isles of Scilly. That light is deceptive, for it carries with it a suggestion of warmth — whereas, as Francis Quarles reflected, it is often crisply cold. It was cold now in the hotel motorboat that plied every day between St. Mary's and the other principal islands.

In the Scillies, when the weather is fine, you go out for the day. If you are rich you hire a motorboat and go off on your own to the bird sanctuary of Annet or to the tiny archipelago known as the Eastern Islands. If you are not rich, or if you like the society of other human beings, you ask your hotel to pack up a box lunch and go with six, or as many as twenty, other people to Tresco or Bryher or St. Martin's or St. Agnes's. During the day you swim, fish, or wander about one of the islands. If you are lucky you may get a rich cream tea at one of the cottages. In the early evening the motorboat brings you and the others back to St. Mary's.

Quarles, who was taking a holiday after clearing up the strange case of the disappearing politician, found himself enjoying this idle and simple life. He felt at peace with the world and with his companions in the motorboat. There were six of them this time, and he knew all except one by name.

First, there was Miss Gwen Farquhar, who sat trailing a thin blue-veined hand in the cold blue water. Miss Farquhar, white-haired, faintly aristocratic, and in her seventies, came out every day with her wicker-work lunch basket. She was an old woman of great spirit and intelligence, and Quarles liked her very much. Then there was Miss Murrell, a neat spinsterish schoolmistress who wore large horn-rimmed spectacles and had her hair screwed into a bun at the back of her head. Then Springer, a fair-haired young man with that Austrialian accent which is so easily mistaken for Cockney, who occasionally varied his outings by making the twenty-minute trip by air to the mainland. These three had been staying for some days at Quarles's hotel. But he also knew the Playfairs, the young couple who always held hands in the boat and got out every day at Tresco. The sixth person in the motorboat, a red-faced man in a porkpie hat, had arrived at the hotel on the

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previous evening, and Quarles did not yet know his name.

There were only murmurs of conversation as the boat drew away from St. Mary's. The water was choppy, and little bursts of spray struck the faces of the passengers. The lunch baskets had been put in the bottom of the boat and covered with a tarpaulin. Miss Farquhar took her hand out of the water as the boat made its way toward a small island out of which rose two moss-covered hills.

"Hullo," said Quarles. "Somebody landing on Samson?"

Springer, farther up in the boat, turned round with a smile. "That's me," he said. "Always wanted to have an island to myself."

The island of Samson is a curiosity in the Scillies, which is full of curiosities. It was inhabited for hundreds of years until, in the Nineteenth Century, most of the menfolk of the island were drowned at sea and their families returned to the main island of St. Mary's. Today the island is uninhabited, but traces of gardens and brick cottages still remain.

Samson has no harbor, and those who want to stop there have to go ashore in a dinghy. Springer had just stepped into it when Miss Murrell said, "I think I'll visit Samson too. I really must see those old cottages before I go back. You won't mind, will you, Mr. Springer?" She dived under the tarpaulin for her lunch basket, as he had done.

Springer assented rather hollowly. The two were rowed ashore and disappeared together along the beach. From Samson the boat went on to Tresco where the Playfairs were deposited, and from Tresco to St. Martin's where Quarles and Miss Farquhar got off at the little landing quay, together with the red-faced man in the porkpie hat who strode off purposefully up to the cluster of houses that is grandly called Lower Town, in distinction from Middle Town and Higher Town where the rest of the island's 130 inhabitants lived.

Miss Farquhar smiled at Quarles. With a very creditable mimicry of Miss Murrell she said, "I think I'll visit St. Martin's too. You won't think I'm throwing myself at your head, will you, Mr. Quarles?"

Quarles laughed. "Let's walk over the hill to St. Martin's Bay."

Three-quarters of an hour later they were in a sheltered cove on the other side of the island. The sun shone brightly on the silver sand. It was almost warm enough to go in swimming.

"My," said Miss Farquhar. "I feel hungry." She undid the strap of her nearly new wicker basket with the initials *G. F.* painted on the inside of the top, and peeped at the contents of the packets wrapped in wax paper. She made an exclamation of annoyance. "Well, now, that's too bad! I like egg and anchovy sandwiches, I love egg and anchovy sandwiches — but today I asked for meat as a change, and what do I get?"

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She raised her hands in mock despair. "Egg and anchovy sandwiches." She took out her thermos bottle, poured some tea into a metal cup, and drank.

"I hope the tea's —" Quarles began — and stopped.

Miss Farquhar's face had contorted into an expression of agony, her body had shivered and writhed, and she now fell backward on the sand. Within a minute, under Quarles's horrified and unbelieving eyes, she died.

Round the hill at the corner of the bay there appeared, striding as purposefully as ever, the red-faced man with the porkpie hat.

The man in the porkpie hat was named Greenaway and he proved to be a sergeant in the Metropolitan Police Force, on holiday in the islands. Quarles was glad to see him, for crime is rare in the Scillies, and they have no regular police force. With the help of Greenaway and a neighboring farmer, Quarles carried out the grim duty of getting Miss Farquhar's body back to the St. Martin's landing quay. By mid-afternoon a doctor in St. Mary's had examined her, and an uncommonly hard-faced Quarles was investigating the murder.

The tea in Miss Farquhar's thermos had been loaded with cyanide of potassium. But how had it got there? As Quarles and Greenaway traced it back, it became more and more difficult to explain. The maid who had poured the tea into Miss Farquhar's thermos bottle had been a little late, and Miss Farquhar had waited for her in the hotel lobby, ready to go down to the motorboat. The maid had watched Miss Farquhar pack the thermos in her lunch basket, with the initials *G. F.* on the inside of the top, and had seen her walk down to the quay a few yards away. Had the poison been inserted on the boat, then? But that was impossible. Quarles himself could testify that there had been no chance for anyone to tamper with the interiors of lunch-baskets while they were lying under the tarpaulin sheet.

Investigation of Miss Farquhar's room turned up her bankbook and revealed that she had been surprisingly well off. And to judge from the correspondence they found, she seemed to have had no relatives and very few friends. There was, of course, no indication of how her money had been left. Until more information was obtained from the mainland, it appeared to be a motiveless murder.

Quarles questioned the maid who had brought the thermos. "Did you prepare the sandwiches for Miss Farquhar?"

"Oh, no, sir. The chef did that."

Quarles asked the chef: "Why did you make egg and anchovy sandwiches for Miss Farquhar today when she had asked for meat?"

The chef was indignant. "They were meat, sir — roast beef. I packed them with my own hands."

"Did anyone else order egg and anchovy today?" The chef thought a

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moment, and then shook his head. "But Miss Farquhar generally had them?"

"That's right, sir. She'd had them three days running."

"Were any of the other baskets like Miss Farquhar's? — in appearance, I mean. Would there have been any chance of mistaking one basket for another?"

"There they are, sir." The motorboat passengers had all returned, and their baskets lay on the kitchen table. None was in the least like Miss Farquhar's. Springer's was an old and battered affair wrapped in a loose oilproof cover. Miss Murrell's was a neat attaché-case with fittings inside. Greenaway's was a leather satchel. The Playfairs used an old biscuit tin. Quarles's stare at the different baskets was prolonged. Then he turned away. "Yes, I see," he said.

The next morning there were only four passengers in the motorboat. Playfair came out of his preoccupation with his wife sufficiently to ask, "Where's Mr. Quarles today?"

"I think he took the plane over to the mainland," Miss Murrell said in her precise voice. "He was up very early. I'm going to Bryher today, Mr. Springer." Springer did not reply, and she added coyly, "Are *you* coming to Bryher?"

"No, Samson again." His tone implied clearly that he was looking forward to a day on the island alone. When the boat reached Samson, he sprang into the dinghy, eager to be ashore. "Pick you up about 5," the boatman said, and Springer nodded. He waved goodbye, and then wandered about on one of the springy moss-covered peaks of Samson.

The island is not always unoccupied, for more than one motorboat lands there. From the peak Springer scanned the island through a pair of field glasses, but he saw no one. He then made his way briskly down to the valley between the two peaks. Close to a large, oddly-shaped boulder he stooped and uncovered something in the grass. Absorbed in his task, he heard no approaching footsteps and was utterly surprised when Quarles's voice said, "Drop that, Springer."

Springer looked up. There was a revolver in Quarles's hand, and at Quarles's side stood Greenaway.

Springer dropped what he was holding. It was a wicker lunch basket, with the initials G. F. painted on the inside of the top. With no sign of regret in his voice, Quarles said, "This will hang you, Springer."

"He was poor old Miss Farquhar's nephew," Quarles said to Greenaway afterwards. "He lived in Australia, but she didn't know what he looked like. She'd been corresponding with him, and had been foolish enough to tell him that he was her only relative and that she'd made him her heir. Springer was planning to return to Australia, and then come back a few months later to claim his inheritance. . . . That was the motive, but it wasn't necessary to know the motive

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in order to discover the murderer."

"I don't see how you knew it was Springer."

"The apparent method of murder was by dropping cyanide into Miss Farquhar's thermos bottle. Normally, there would have been half a dozen times when that could have been done without the murderer being observed. Unfortunately for Springer, this was not the case. There had been not a single opportunity for Springer to drop the poison into Miss Farquhar's thermos.

"That left only one possible conclusion — *that the lunch basket containing the poisoned thermos wasn't Miss Farquhar's.*

"And that was supported by the evidence of the sandwiches. Springer noticed that she had eaten egg and anchovy sandwiches for three consecutive days. He prepared them for the substitute basket which he had purchased on one of his trips to the mainland. He switched baskets on the boat and took Miss Farquhar's, intending to burn it on Samson Island. But that manhunting Miss Murrell pursued him, and he was only able to get away from her long enough to hide it. That was why he went back today — to dispose of it."

"But why Springer?" persisted Greenaway. "It might have been any one of them."

Quarles shook his head. "No. It could only be Springer. None of the others would have dared to bring down openly a basket exactly like Miss Farquhar's. It would have been remembered afterwards. You had a satchel, Miss Murrell used an attaché-case, the Playfairs an old biscuit tin. *But we never saw Springer's lunch basket!* It was concealed in a loose oilproof cover, and when he made the substitution he simply slipped the cover from one basket to another under the tarpaulin. That was clever. But," Quarles added thoughtfully, "not clever enough."

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Julia Peterkin learned about Negroes at the source. When her mother died in giving birth to Mrs. Peterkin, the tiny baby, born on Hallowe'en with a caul, was placed under the care of a wise old colored woman. Later, Mrs. Peterkin put her own son under the care of another remarkable old Negress. It was from these two nurses, and from the 450 Negroes who work on her husband's South Carolina plantation, that Julia Peterkin learned the folklore and the dialect and the very thoughts of the particular type of Southern Negro about whom she writes so superbly.

"Ashes" is one of a group of stories about which has been said: "Nothing so stark, taut, poignant, has come out of the South in 50 years." Another critic has pointed out that Mrs. Peterkin "has given to a modern public the half-barbaric plantation Negro in a form quite new; a courageous, inarticulate, heart-tearing creature to whom propaganda or race-conflict is yet unknown." And the author herself has told of her literary aims: "I mean to present these people," she once stated, "in a patient struggle with fate, and not in any race conflict."

In 1928, Mrs. Peterkin's SCARLET SISTER MARY *appeared, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize the next spring as the best novel of its year. The book was later dramatized, with Ethel Barrymore in the starring role.*

"Ashes" is the story of an old Negro woman, her face a mesh of wrinkles, her hands withered-looking, her feet bare, cold, and dusty — an old, old Maum who finds herself, near the end of her life, in a desperate plight. In this single short story are all the qualities of Mrs. Peterkin's fine literary talent: pathos, pity, poignancy, in the portrait of a courageous, illiterate, heart-tearing old Gullah Negress . . .

ASHES

by JULIA PETERKIN

AN OLD PLANTATION WITH SMOOTH-planted fields and rich woodlands and pastures, where little shaded streams run, lies right at the edge of a low wide swamp.

Steep red hills, rising sheer above the slimy mud, lift it out of the reach of two yellow-brown rivers that sprawl drowsily along before they come together to form one slow-moving stream.

The rivers are hidden by huge

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trees garlanded with tangled vines, and the swamp seems a soft, undulating, colorful surface that fades into a low line of faint blue hills far away on the other side.

Those hills are the outside world, but the swamp is wide and pathless.

The two rivers commonly lie complacent, but on occasion they rouse and flood low places with furious, yellow water. They lunge and tear at the hillsides that hold the plantation above them until their violence is spent; then they creep back into their rightful channels, leaving other sodden acres desolate and covered with bent, ruined stalks that show where fields of cotton and corn were ripe and ready for harvest.

The old plantation sits always calm. Undisturbed. The rivers can never reach it. And the outside world may rumble and change, but it cannot come any nearer.

Years pass by and leave things unaltered. The same narrow, red roads run through cotton and cornfields. The same time-grayed cabins send up threads of smoke from their red-clay chimneys. Summer brings the same flowers around doorways, and china-berry and crape-myrtle blossoms to drop gay petals on little half-clothed black children.

Fields lush with cotton and corn are enlivened by bright-turbaned black women. Sinewy men with soft-stepping bare feet laugh and sing as they guide patient mules up and down the long rows.

When winter browns the fields and brings cold winds up from the swamp, women and children huddle over uncertain fires or gather on sunshiny doorsteps while the men creep down to the swamp in search of food and adventure.

There is nothing to hint that life here could be sweet or that its current runs free and strong. Winter, summer, birth, death, these seem to be all.

The main road on the plantation divides. One straggling, rain-rutted fork runs along the edge of a field to a cluster of low, weather-beaten houses grouped under giant red-oak trees. The Quarters, where most of the black people live.

The other fork bends with a swift, smooth curve, and glides into a grove of cedars and live-oaks and magnolias, whose dense evergreen branches hide all beyond them but slight glimpses of white columns and red brick chimneys.

Right where the two roads meet is a sycamore tree. Its milk-white branches reach up to the sky. Its pale, silken leaves glisten and whisper incomplete cadences in the hot summer sunshine.

When frost crisps the leaves and stains them and cuts them away, they flutter down, leaving golden balls to adorn every bough.

There is hardly a sign of the black, twisted roots. There is not a trace to be seen of their silent, tense struggle as they grope deep down in the earth. There is nothing to show how they reach and grapple and hold, or how

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in the darkness down among the worms they work out mysterious chemistries that change damp clay into beauty.

A little one-roomed log cabin sitting back from the crooked plantation road was gray and weather-stained and its shingled roof was green with moss, but its front was strangely like a cheerful face.

Its narrow open front door made a nose, at each side a small square window with a half-open wooden blind made an eye, and the three rickety steps that led from the door into the front yard made a very good mouth.

The face was warped and cracked with age, but it looked pleasant in the bright morning sun. The gnarled crape-myrtle tree that hugged one corner and almost hid the cabin's red clay chimney was gay with pink blossoms. The front yard, divided in the middle by a clean-swept sandy path, was filled with rich-scented red roses and glossy-leave gardenia bushes, whose white, waxen blooms perfumed the air.

This was old Maum Hannah's home. Most of the land around her had been sold. But the space she occupied was very small, she was no trouble to anybody, and there was really no reason to disturb her. A few hens, a cow, a patch of peanuts, and a vegetable garden fenced around with hand-split clapboards made her independent. The crossroads store was not far away, "des a dog's pant" she called it, and there she exchanged well-filled peanuts, new-laid eggs, and frying-size chickens for meal and coffee and plug-cut tobacco. And she was always ready to divide whatever she had with her friends, or with anybody in need.

To a stranger her old arms might look weak and withered, but they were strong enough to wield an ax on the fallen limbs of the trees in the woods back of the house, and the fire in her open fireplace was never allowed to go out, summer or winter.

On this spring morning she sat in a low chair by the fireplace and warmed her crusty bare feet by the charred sticks that burned smokily there among the ashes. She held her breakfast in a pan in her lap and ate slowly while she talked to herself and to the gray cat that lay on the clay hearth by her feet. The cat opened its eyes and purred lazily when she spoke, then drowsed again.

At a sudden rumbling sound outside, the cat jumped up and stretched and walked slowly to the door to look out.

"Who dat?" Maum Hannah asked, and she turned to look out too.

Two strange white men were driving up to the house in a buggy. When they got out, they hitched the horse to the clapboard garden fence.

"A nice house spot," one of them said.

"Yes," the other agreed, "and the darkies say there's a fine spring coming out of the hill right behind the house there."

Maum Hannah was a little hard of

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hearing, but her eyes were keen. She put down her pan of breakfast and stood in the door. Her astonishment made her forget her manners, until one of the men called out: "Good morning, Auntie."

Then she dropped a low curtsey and answered: "Good mawnin', suh."

"We're just a-lookin' around a little," the man continued in an apologetic tone, for her old eyes, puzzled and alarmed, were on him.

"Yes, suh;" she said politely, but she leaned against the door-facing for support.

"It must be a healthy place. That old woman looks like she might be a hundred years old," one said facetiously, and they both chuckled as they walked back into the woods behind the house toward the spring.

Presently Maum Hannah saw them coming back into the front yard. She watched them step off distances. They drove down a few stakes. When they had finished, one of them came to the doorstep and held out a silver coin to her. She bowed gravely as she took it.

"Buy you some tobacco with this, Auntie," he drawled, and he turned away awkwardly. Then he faced her again and cleared his throat as if embarrassed.

"Auntie," he hesitated, "I hate to tell you this — but you'll have to make arrangements to go somewhere else, I reckon." He did not meet her eyes. "You see," he continued, "I've done bought this place, and I'm goin' to build my house right here."

Maum Hannah stared at him, but did not reply.

"Well, goodbye," he added, and the two men got into the buggy and drove away.

Maum Hannah watched them until they were out of sight, then she held the coin out in her wrinkled hand and looked at it. It shone bright against the dark-lined palm.

Tears welled up under her shriveled eyelids and hesitated, as if uncertain which path to take through the maze of wrinkles on her cheeks. One shining drop fell with a splash on the silver in her hand. With a sigh she dropped the money into her apron pocket, wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and turned inside. Taking a handful of meal from a large gourd on the shelf by the door, she scattered it on the ground near the doorstep where a hen with tiny, fluffy chickens around her clucked.

The very next day, white men with wagon-loads of lumber drove into the yard. They had red, sunburned faces, and their shoes and blue overalls were worn and dusty. Maum Hannah looked at them.

"Po-buckra," she said to the cat.

The men sawed and hammered and mixed mortar and smoothed it between red bricks with clinking trowels. Day after day they came. Yellow pine boards made the air fragrant and soon the frame of a new house cast its shadow over Maum Hannah's gardenias and red rose-bushes.

"I 'f'aid they gwine stop bloomin' now," she said sadly to the cat.

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At last the house was finished. One of the men who first came walked up the narrow, clean-swept, sandy path and tapped on the side of Maum Hannah's house with a stick. She came to the door and listed as he drawled nasally:

"Auntie, my house is done now. My folks want to move in next week. You'll have to be movin'. You know I told you that at first. We can't have you a-livin' here in our back yard. Of course, if you was young enough to work, it 'ud be different, but you ain't able to do nothing. I'll need your house anyway to put a cook in. I thought you'd 'a' done been gone before now. I told you in time, you know."

Maum Hannah listened attentively. She heard only part of what he said, but she understood. She must go. She must leave home. It was no longer her home, but *his*.

Her loose old lips trembled as she bowed in answer to him.

She did not go to bed that night. She sat in the low chair by the clay hearth where a pine-knot fire wavered and flickered. She filled her cob pipe and puffed at it briskly until it burned red, then she mumbled to herself until it died out and grew cold in her fingers. Rousing up, she'd light it with a fresh coal, smoke for a few puffs, then, absorbed in her trouble, she'd forget it and let it go out.

The cat on the hearth looked up and blinked sleepily whenever Maum Hannah repeated:

"He say dis *he* place an' I haffer go f'om heah. Whe' I duh gwine? Who kin tell me dat? Whe' I duh gwine?"

There was Killdee. "My niece," she called him. He was her sister's son and her neighbor. Killdee might come and take her to live with him. But his cabin was very small. Rose's voice was sharp sometimes. No, she could not go there. If Margaret were living — or if she knew where any of her boys were — she might go to them.

She thought of the peaceful graveyard and lifted her old, wrinkled hands above her head in prayer.

"Oh, do, Massa Jedus, he'p me fo' know wha' fo' do. I ain' got no place fo' go. I ain' got nobody fo' tell me. I don' haffer tell You de trouble I got. You know, I ain' got nobody fo' he'p me but You. I know You mus' be gwine he'p me. I eber did been do de bes' I kin. Mebbe sometime I fail. — But, Jedus! Gawd! I know You couldn't hab de hea't to see me suffer! Widout a place to lay my haid." She intoned her prayer and rocked from side to side as she pleaded for help.

Then she stood up. Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Do gi' me a sign fo' know wha' fo' do. Please, Suh! Do, Massa Jedus! Gi' me a sign! All my chillen's gone an' lef me heah ——"

Her bony arms were raised high and her knotted fingers held the cold pipe. Her supplications were emphasized with tense jerks of her arms. With a start she became conscious

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that ashes from her pipe were trickling down through her fingers and falling on the floor. She stopped and looked at them.

Ashes! Cold ashes! She had asked for a sign and the sign had come. It was *ashes!* Plain as the dawn that streaked the East! There was no doubt of it!

The thought stimulated her like a drug. She went to the door and looked out. A young day reddened the East. The sky was red like fire. "Another sign," she thought. A sign from Heaven.

She lifted her arms and, with tears streaming, said softly: "Yessuh, Massa Jedus, I understan' You, Suh. You say it mus' be *ashes!* Ashes an' de fiery cloud! Yessuh, I know wha' You tell me fo' do."

Without hesitating, she went to the hearth and took up a brand of fire. Walking quickly to the front of the new dwelling and stumbling up the steps, she laid it with trembling hands near the front door. Then she went back into the yard and gathered up an apronful of shavings. She sprinkled these carefully on the smoking pine, and knelt and blew until her breath fanned it into flame. Then she went for more shavings and more wood. When the fire grew strong, she left it and went to her own cabin. She did not sit down but unlocked a trunk in the corner.

Selecting a clean white apron from the clothing there, she put it on, put a stiff-starched white sunbonnet on her head, and tied the strings carefully under her chin. Then she locked the trunk again and put the key in her apron pocket.

The crackle and the roar of the fire outside was startling, but she made herself take time. She closed the wooden blinds of the cabin and latched them on the inside. She pulled the chair away from the hearth, then went out of the door and closed it and locked it behind her. She stepped carefully down the steps, walked past the flaming house, and then on, and on, down the narrow road.

Once she stopped to look back at the flames that already rose high in the sky, but she did not change her steady gait.

"Jedus! It's a long way!" she complained when the road got sandy and her breath became short, but she kept up her pace.

At last the village came in sight. The open spaces became smaller. Low, white-painted cottages huddled close together. She walked slower. Then she stopped and gazed ahead.

A man driving a team of mules to a wagon was coming. She waited until he reached her, then inquired calmly:

"Son, kin you tell me which-a-way de sheriff lib?"

"Yes'm," the man answered. He stood up in the wagon and looked toward the houses in the little town.

"You see da' kinder high-lookin' house up yonder on da' hill? De one wid de big white pillar in f'ont ob 'em? Da's de place. De sheriff lib right dere."

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Her eyes followed where he pointed.

"T'ank you, son," she said; "Gawd bless you," and started on toward the house he indicated.

The man watched her a minute, then he clucked to his mules to move on. She was a stranger to him. What did she want with the sheriff? Such an old woman.

The sheriff had just finished breakfast when she reached the back door and asked to see him.

"Who is she?" he asked the servant who told him.

"I dunno, suh," was the answer. "A old 'oman. Look lak 'e come a long way. 'E seem out o' breat'."

The sheriff lit a cigar and went to see for himself.

"Good morning, Auntie," he said pleasantly in response to her profound curtsey. "What can I do for you this morning?" The old woman looked at his kind face, and tears came to her eyes.

"Cap'n sheriff," she began brokenly, "I too troub-led, suh."

Her dry old hands held to each other nervously.

"I dunno wha' you gwine do wid me, suh —" She swallowed a sob. "I reckon you haffer put me on de chain-gang — I done so ol', too — I wouldn't be much 'count at you put me on —"

The sheriff smiled behind his hand.

"Why, Auntie, what have you been doing?"

"A po-buckra man de one done it, suh. He de one. I lib all dis time. I ain't neber do nobody a hahm t'ing een my life, not tell dis mawnin'. No, suh. You kin ax anybody 'bout me, suh, an' dey'll tell you de same t'ing."

"Well, what have you done now?" the sheriff insisted. She came nearer to him, encouraged by his gentleness. She spoke in a low tone.

"Dis is how it been, suh." She looked around to see that nobody heard, then began to tell.

"A po-buckra man come an' buil' 'e house right een my front ya'd. 'E say it *he* place, now. 'E say I got to go way. I been lib een my house eber sence I kin 'member. Ol' Cap'n sell de plantation, but 'e tell me fo' stay whe' I is. I stay. Dis po-buckra man come an' tell me I mus' go. Whe' I gwine? My peoples is all gone. Mos' o' dem a-layin' een de grabeya'd. I dunno why Jedus see fitten to leab me heah all dis long time —" She lifted her apron to wipe her eyes. "Las' night I call on Him, up yonder. I beg 'em fo' he'p me. Fo' tell me wha' fo' do. I rassle wid 'em tell 'E gi' me a sign. Yessuh! 'E answer me! 'E gi' me one!"

Her puckered old face lighted up with emotion. Her voice quivered.

" 'E gi' me a sign f'om heaben, yessuh. *Ashes! Ashes an' fire!* Him up yonder tell me so!"

Then she leaned forward and whispered: "I put fire to de man house. I bu'n 'em down same lak Jedus tell me fo' do. Yessuh! Den I come right on heah fo' tell you I done 'em."

"Did your house burn too?"

"Oh, no, suh. Jedus sen' a win' fo' blow de spark de udder way."

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"Who are you, Auntie?" The sheriff's voice was pitying. Gentle.

"Dis duh me, Hannah Jeems, suh. I one o' ol' Mass' Richard Jeems' niggers, suh. My white folks is all gone. Gone an' lef' me. Times was tight. Dey had to sell de plantation an' go." She stood before him awaiting sentence with her eyes cast down.

"You walked all the way here from the James plantation this morning?"

"Yessuh. Quick ez I set de house on fire, I come heah fo' tell you, suh."

"Why did you come to tell me?" he asked.

"Well, suh," she hesitated and a faraway look filled her eyes, "when I was a chillen I heah ol' Mass' Richard say, de niggers ain' know, but *he* know. De sheriff is de bes' frien' de niggers is got een dis worl', next to Him and Jedus. Mass' Richard been a mighty wise man."

The sheriff looked at the pathetic figure before him. At the mesh of fine wrinkles on her face. At the small, black, frightened hands, clasping and unclasping. At the bare, old, dusty feet. They had walked many a weary mile since life for them first began. His own clear eyes became moist.

"Come on into the kitchen, Auntie. The cook will give you a cup of coffee and some breakfast. Then we'll talk things over."

"T'ank you, suh," she said gravely as she followed him. When he reached the door, he faced her again and held up a finger.

"It's best not to talk much, Auntie," he warned her.

She smiled at him brightly.

"Ef da man didn' been a po-buckra 'e wouldn' do me so," she said wistfully. His brow was knit as if he were uncertain what to say.

"Auntie," he spoke slowly, distinctly, "you believe in the Bible, don't you?"

"Oh, yessuh," she affirmed solemnly, "I can' read 'em, but I b'lieb 'em."

"Did you ever hear how the Bible says you must not let your right hand know what your left hand does?"

"Oh, yessuh," she said reverently.

"Can you remember that passage of Scripture? I think you can."

She looked at him shrewdly, then she smiled and bowed very low. "T'ank you, suh. T'ank you! An' may Gawd bless you, suh!"

The sheriff was embarrassed. He cleared his throat and awkwardly flicked the ashes off his cigar.

"Auntie," he hesitated, "I'm thinking about riding up that way this morning. I might take you back home."

Maum Hannah bowed again.

The distance to the crossroads store was soon covered by the sheriff's high-powered car. He stopped.

"Jim," he called out to the proprietor, "I hear one of your neighbors lost his new house by fire last night. Did he have any insurance on it?"

"Yes, sir," Jim answered. "Wasn't he lucky to have it?"

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"How does he think the house caught?" asked the sheriff.

"He doesn't know, sir, unless it caught from a spark out of Maum Hannah's chimney. It seems she was gone off for the night."

"Yes," said the sheriff, "she came all the way to me hunting for a place to stay. I'm taking her back home now. She may as well stay on there for now, don't you think so?"

Jim nodded his head confidently.

"I tell you, sheriff, I don't believe anybody'd build a house there again. It's a bad-luck place. It always was."

When Maum Hannah got out of the car in front of her home, a great pile of ashes still smoldered there. She held to the sheriff's hand with both of her quivering ones when she told him goodbye.

"Gawd bless you, son!"

"Come back to me if you ever get in trouble again," the sheriff told her.

"T'ank you kindly, suh," she answered, "but I ain' gwine nebber risk gittin' in trouble no mo'. Not me."

She unlocked her door and fed the cat, and added a few pieces of wood to the fire; then she scattered meal for the frightened hen and chickens.

When the fire blazed bright, she drew up the little chair before it and sat down. She was tired. She sat still and smoked and nodded. As she dozed, she said softly to the cat:

"Ashes is de bes' t'ing eber was fo' roses."

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One of Chief Inspector Hazlerigg's "neatest" cases

THE NEAT MAN

by MICHAEL GILBERT

CHIEF INSPECTOR HAZLERIGG reserved his most intolerant criticisms for what he called "pinch of dust" detectives.

I think the expression originated in his mind when I told him of a story I had read in a magazine about a detective whose only clue to the identity of a felon was a sample of dust from the cuffs of his trousers — the felon's trousers, I mean. Microscopic analysis revealed that this dust was composed in equal parts of a green chalk, of grains of sand of a type found only at Bognor Regis; and of particles of powdered granite belonging to a geological stratum which, surprisingly enough, approaches the earth's surface at Bickley. It was then child's play to deduce, look for, and arrest a billiard marker of Bickley who took his summer holidays at Bognor.

"Why?" said Hazlerigg. "Why not an enthusiastic snooker player from Bognor with relatives at Bickley?"

"Or," suggested Inspector Pickup, "a man who lived at Orpington but worked in a shop at Bickley and had, in his back garden, a sand-pit which his predecessor had stocked with sand from Bognor."

"Or a man who had bought a pair of trousers second-hand from a chap who had exchanged *his* trousers for —"

"All right, all right," I said. "We yield the point. You mean, I take it, that it's no good using these scientific analyses to catch your man."

"Oh, there's nothing wrong with science," said Hazlerigg, broadmindedly. "Once the prisoner's in custody, let science have its head. So long as it's the sort of science a jury will swallow," he added. "It's taken them 50 years to believe in fingerprints."

"Then if you don't catch them by science —?"

Hazlerigg observed the bait, but appeared to accept the hook.

"That's what you've been leading up to all along, isn't it?" he said. "All right, I'll tell you. There's no terrific secret about it. Take burglars. Apart from the ones which may actually be caught on the job — and the British householder perpetually amazes me by his willingness to tackle anything up to twice his own weight in armed housebreakers — out of every hundred who eventually get caught, I should say that 50, at least, run into trouble trying to dispose of the proceeds."

"Watch the fences," agreed Pickup.

"Well, it's a sad reflection on human nature," went on Hazlerigg, "but the next biggest group are those who are given away by informers."

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"And the rest?"

"Miscellaneous. Hard work and concentration on the M. O. files."

"I've never really understood that," I said. "I mean, I know the principle of *modus operandi*. You are called to a burglary in Hampstead and you find that the pantry window has been forced with a bricklayer's trowel and that the burglar has helped himself to a cup of tea before leaving by the back door. You then trot back to Scotland Yard, turn up the index, and discover that the only man on your books who habitually uses a bricklayer's trowel *and* gains access by pantry windows *and* helps himself to a cup of tea is Smokey Joe. So you send someone off to pull Joe in, and if Joe can't explain his movements last Friday evening, then ten to one he's for it. That's about it, isn't it?"

"More or less."

"Then what I don't understand is, why doesn't Joe take the trouble to change his habits? He's only got to open, say, the library window with a pick head, or even wait till he gets home before he has his cup of tea, and he's safe as houses."

"You might think so," said Hazlerigg. "It doesn't work out that way. First, because a lot of the items in the M.O. index are things that he *can't* change or, at least, would be very unlikely to change. The type of stuff he steals — well, that'll depend on what facilities he has for getting rid of it, doesn't it? If his receiver gives him top prices for fur coats, then fur coats he must have. The demand creates the supply. Again, take the question of whether he works alone or not: now that's a matter of temperament. He's born with it —"

"In fundamentals, I agree; but what about the little things."

"Look here," said Hazlerigg. "If I told you that it was vitally important that you shouldn't hitch up the knees of your trousers before sitting down in a chair — as I've noticed once or twice is a habit of yours — if I told you that your life depended on your not doing it, could you *guarantee* that you wouldn't do it again — say, next week?"

"Well — no. Perhaps not. But I don't think that's a fair analogy."

Hazlerigg grinned and looked at Inspector Pickup, who mouthed a word which sounded like "Copley" and they both laughed.

That was all I got out of them, at the time. The story was still in the Top Secret drawer. I heard the rest of it some time later.

During the aftermath of the late war, at a time when all the crime charts were rocketing, Scotland Yard started to become conscious of the activities of a new burglar. All criminals whose work is both distinctive and successful — successful, I mean, from the criminal's point of view — are apt to acquire simple nicknames and this burglar was known to the police of the Metropolis and Home Counties as The Flat Man (because he specialized in flats) or more commonly as The Neat Man, because he

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never left many traces of his visit, unless you can call the absence of the owner's silver, jewelery, and clothing a trace. He was also called The Neat Man for another reason which will presently appear.

"He works single-handed," said Hazlerigg, when he was presenting an analysis to the Assistant Commissioner (The Neat Man had become that important). "And either he is the most marvelous lock-picker alive or else he has the art of selecting the right key for the right door. He never forces a catch. He never goes through a window. So far as we know he enters like a gentleman, by the front door which he opens, as I said, with a key or in some other painless manner."

"Catch locks?" said the Assistant Commissioner.

"Oh, no, sir. Everything. Mortice locks and all. Then there's another thing. He seems to know his way about so uncannily. We can usually pick up his footprints. He has an exceptionally small neat foot and often wears dancing pumps. Many of these expensive flats have floor-to-floor carpets and when we arrive on the scene before it's been too trodden over, we can follow his progress there and back. It's always the same story. He comes in the front door; he goes straight to the room he wants; he takes what he can find — I mean, he never breaks open cupboards or desks, he just lifts whatever comes handy; then he goes straight back again to the hall — and then, there was something used to puzzle us. You'd see his footsteps going straight up the hall. Suddenly, for no reason, they'd stop, there'd be a mark where he'd turned, and a pair of prints pointing sideways, towards the wall, if you follow me. Usually with the toeprints clearer than the heels."

"It sounds quite mad to me," said the Assistant Commissioner. "What did you make of it?"

"We made nothing of it at first," said Hazlerigg. "But when we did spot it, well, it was perfectly obvious. He was a tie-twiddler."

"A what?"

"A tie-twiddler or a hair-smoother or a lapel-brusher — I mean, he was the sort of man who couldn't pass a looking glass without stopping for a moment to peer at himself. Probably did it quite unconsciously. Being on the small side — as his footprints indicate — he usually had to stand on tiptoe. Hence the marks."

"So all we've got to do," said the Assistant Commissioner, "is to search London for a small man who admires himself in looking glasses." He didn't say it unkindly. He appreciated the difficulties.

Inspector Hazlerigg had found himself in charge of The Neat Man investigation in the fortuitous way that things sometimes happened at Scotland Yard. The Neat Man seemed to specialize in stealing good clothes. Good clothes were a strong black-market proposition. Hazlerigg was known to be an expert on black-market offenses — it was, in fact, his chief occupation. Therefore, The Neat

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Man was handed to him. Hazlerigg was neither pleased nor grateful. He had a good deal on his plate already. Nevertheless he made the routine investigations in the same thorough way that he did all his work. All the relevant reports were brought to him and he studied them and analysed them and cross-indexed the results and hoped for a break. Then, one night, the job ceased to be routine.

Hazlerigg was living, at that time, in a furnished flat towards the Highgate end of Hornsey Lane. He came home to it at a quarter to midnight after a long day. He felt very tired. When he got in he went to the sideboard for a tankard of beer and found, to his surprise, that the cupboard was empty. There had been some table silver in it as well as the tankards; also a pair of rather nice small Georgian candlesticks. They were gone, too. With a sudden sinking feeling he made for his bedroom and opened the wardrobe. "Both suits and my dinner jacket," he said, "curse him!" He reached for the telephone.

"It's Mr. Neat all right," said the Divisional Detective-Inspector. "It's got all the trademarks. Here's where he stopped to take a look at himself —" he pointed to a barometer which had been hanging on the wall predicting *Wet to Stormy* ever since Hazlerigg had come into the flat. "No marks of forcing on the door, either. Did you turn the lock when you went out, sir?"

Hazlerigg had the grace to blush. "No," he said. "I forgot."

From that moment he really started putting his back into the job.

First thing next morning he summoned Sergeant Brakewell to his room. What Sergeant Brakewell didn't know about locks could hardly be classified as knowledge.

"How do burglars set about picking locks?" Hazlerigg asked. "In particular, the locks on the doors of flats."

"Well, sir," said Sergeant Brakewell, "it's a big subject. But roughly speaking —"

At the end of three-quarters of an hour he paused for breath and Hazlerigg said, "As I understand it, catch locks are easy. You push the tongue back with a stiff bit of talc, or gum the works up with liquid paraffin, and use a plain key. Mortice locks are more difficult, but most real experts have such a fine collection of basic keys — what people call skeleton keys — that they can usually find one to fit. And if it won't quite fit they cover it with lamp black, push it in, look at the scratches, file it down a trifle, and bob's your uncle."

"That's about it," said Sergeant Brakewell.

"Right. Now here are the records of more than 40 housebreakings. We're pretty certain they are the same man. I'll let you have them to study and I'll arrange for you to see the actual lock itself if you think it'll be helpful — and if you want a recent and untouched specimen," he added grimly, "I have the very thing for you at home."

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"So I've heard," said Sergeant Brakewell with a discreet grin.

A week later he made his report.

"I think, sir," he concluded, "that there's no reasonable doubt. In every case the door was opened with a copy of the actual key. As I explained, where the lock's new, a copy key will make very much the same marks as the regular one. But where it's an old lock, one which has developed play, a copy, however careful, will leave marks."

He enumerated them, and Hazlerigg listened a little absent-mindedly.

When Sergeant Brakewell had gone, he opened the Classified Directory and searched under the House Agents until he found the firm he wanted. Then he turned to the records of the cases and went through them again, copying down details.

To Inspector Pickup, two days later, he confided the results of his inquiries.

"I think we're on to something," he said, "though I'm blessed if I can quite see how it works. If Brakewell's right about the keys — and I'd back his judgment in that line against anyone in England — then it means that this burglar must at some time or other have had his hand on the original keys. But then you're up against a difficulty. House keys are things people are apt to be a bit careful with. I mean, they don't leave them lying about or entrust them to perfect strangers. I didn't anyway. I don't think my door key was ever out of my possession."

"But the house agent —"

"Exactly," said Hazlerigg. "So I took the trouble to find out who had acted in the renting of all these flats."

"And it was the same firm?"

"Not quite," said Hazlerigg. "It was three firms. All North London firms, it's true. But not connected with each other, so far as I know. Start & Baxter of Hornsey, Croppers of Highgate, and Shaw, Shaw, Shaw & Shaw of Hampstead. I'm on my way to see Croppers now."

Messrs. Croppers (*If You Want a House of Character Come to Croppers*) have their estate agency on Highgate Hill. It possesses a low entrance, a step down from the pavement, and black beams alternating with cream plaster: all of which are well-known to be signs of Character in a House. Even Mr. Cropper, who wore a Victorian frock coat, had a certain old-fashioned grace about him.

Inspector Hazlerigg introduced himself, and explained a small part of what was in his mind. Mr. Cropper said, "We are always very friendly with Start & Baxter — a very nice little firm. But as for Shaw & Shaw, well, you know, Inspector, they're hardly in our line. In fact, they're hardly the sort of firm I'd care to —"

"Of course."

"I should describe them," said Mr. Cropper, "as modern. We here at Croppers have certain old-fashioned traditions, certain prejudices as to what is fair dealing —"

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Half an hour later Hazlerigg was seated in the chromium and art-leather interior of Messrs. Shaw, Shaw, Shaw & Shaw's estate office in Hampstead. The senior partner, after glancing cautiously at the Chief Inspector's card, said, "Yes, I know Croppers very well. We have as little to do with them as we can. This is an up-to-the-minute business and we try to run it on up-to-the-minute lines."

He glanced complacently at the six huge olive-green steel filing cabinets. "I can't think of any possible — er — line of connection between us. I don't even recollect that we've ever taken on one of their employees. Nor, so far as I know, have any of our employees stepped — er — down to join them."

Mr. Baxter, of Start & Baxter, a little sandy-haired man who worked in a three-room office in Hornsey, proved the most helpful and the easiest to deal with: and in return Hazlerigg told him a great deal more of the truth than he had exposed to either of his rivals.

"Let me see," said Mr. Baxter. "We got your flat for you, didn't we? I thought I recognized you — yes — well, now about those other firms. I don't really have a great deal to do with them — now."

Hazlerigg looked up sharply.

"It used to be different — just after the end of the War, when everybody wanted flats and houses, and people were lining up for anything and everything. There used to be a certain amount of splitting commissions, among the established firms, and I worked in with the Shaws and Croppers on one or two deals. The idea, from our point of view, was to keep the mushroom businesses out of it — and it suited the public too. It meant that they could use two or three different firms to sell their houses without the risk of having to pay two or three commissions."

"But you didn't work together over all these jobs —" Hazlerigg pointed to his list.

"Oh, Lord, no," said Mr. Baxter. "In fact, I don't think any of those were joint jobs. That arrangement was really mostly confined to outright sales."

"I see," said Hazlerigg. "Now about the keys —"

"Well, you're quite right there, too, of course. House agents do hold the keys in nine cases out of ten. It's one of the risks you have to take. We're as careful as we can be in picking our assistants. I've just got my son here and one other, and I'd go bail for both of them. But in a big firm like — well, never mind names. In a big firm, I don't say you mightn't get a bad 'un."

"But so far as you know," said Hazlerigg, "no one person, principal or employer, could have had all the keys on that list."

"You can bet your life on that," agreed Mr. Baxter.

And yet the idea was there.

It was based on something that he had seen or heard when he was completing arrangements for the lease of his own flat. Hazlerigg knew better

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than to try to force these ideas. Instead, he went home early and had a good night's rest.

It was on the top of the bus, on his way to Scotland Yard next morning, that it clicked.

As soon as he reached his office he got on the telephone to Mr. Rumbold of Wragg & Rumbold, Solicitors.

"Can you tell me," he said, "when you acted for me in the lease of my flat — what did we get?"

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Rumbold cautiously.

"What papers did we get? I seem to remember signing a document of some sort which had to be handed over. Did we get anything in exchange?"

"You signed a Counterpart lease," said Mr. Rumbold, "and received the original lease for yourself."

"Have you got it there?"

"It's in my strong room," said Mr. Rumbold.

"Then get it out, please," said Hazlerigg. "I'm coming round to see you."

Half an hour later he was in Mr. Rumbold's office in Coleman Street, and he and his solicitor were examining an engrossment.

"Is there anything that strikes you as unusual about this lease?" asked Hazlerigg.

Mr. Rumbold picked up the four pages of heavy parchment, folded bookwise, and ran a conveyancer's eye over them.

"No," he said at last. "There's certainly nothing irregular about it, if that's what you mean. In fact," he went on, "it's rather a conscientious piece of work."

"Rather unusually conscientious?"

"By present day standards, perhaps, yes. It has a large scale plan, showing each individual room — that is perhaps a little uncommon in a lease of house property."

"And that Schedule thing."

"Most leases of furnished flats have schedules of contents," said Mr. Rumbold. "Then, if any question of dilapidations arises —"

Hazlerigg ran his eye down the Schedule.

"One sideboard with two drawers and two cupboards (locked)," he saw. This appeared to decide him.

"Look here," he said. "Can you get hold of some of the other leases of flats on this list?"

"Well — yes. I might," said Mr. Rumbold. "I think I acted for Mrs. Frobisher myself — and Colonel Davenant goes to Lathoms — they'd lend me the lease if I gave some reason."

"Make up anything you like," said Hazlerigg. "I promise you your professional reputation won't be compromised. But collect as many of them as you can."

"It'll take a bit of time."

"One other thing," said Hazlerigg. "When you'd actually completed the arrangements for my lease, you yourself handed me the keys. That was the fact that stuck in my memory. Now how did you get them? What was the routine? Who gave them to you?"

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"The solicitors on the other side, I should imagine," said Mr. Rumbold. "They handed them over at completion."

"Is that usual?"

"In the sale of a freehold property, yes. In the lease of a flat, it's more usual, perhaps, for the house agent to hand them direct to the incoming tenant."

"But a solicitor is perfectly within his rights in asking for them, so that he can hand them over himself?"

"Certainly, yes. I should say that was the proper way to do it."

"I see," said Hazlerigg. As indeed, he was beginning to.

Mr. Rumbold was better than his word. Two days later he had six leases spread out on his desk when Hazlerigg called. He was examining them with the beginnings of a frown on his plump face.

"There's no doubt about it," he said, in answer to the Inspector's first question. "They were all drawn by the same man. As you know, a solicitor doesn't actually put his name on an engrossment but there are so many points of similarity. You see — the same large scale plan. The same detailed schedules of furniture. But it isn't only that. Look at that last clause —"

When Hazlerigg had deciphered the script he threw back his head and laughed aloud.

"Genius," he said. "That's genius — the genuine unmistakable touch. Now for it. Who drew these leases?"

"That's an easy one to answer," said Mr. Rumbold. "If the same firm acted for all the landlords, I can find them by turning up your file. Incidentally, that explains the agents, too. If we're dealing here with only two or three groups of landlords or estate corporations who employ the same solicitor, they would naturally use the same two or three agents — there's usually some sort of professional tie-up." He was opening the file as he spoke.

"Henryman & Bosforth," he said. "I don't know much about them. Their office is just off Bedford Row."

A little later that morning Inspector Hazlerigg was shown into the outer office of Henryman & Bosforth. Inspector Pickup was just behind him and Sergeant Crabbe loitered unobtrusively on the opposite pavement.

"It's about the lease of my flat," he said to the girl. "Start & Baxter of Hornsey are the agents. They told me —"

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "That'll be our Mr. Copley. He does all that. Would you wait in here for a moment. I'll send him down. Are you —?"

"The other gentleman is with me," said Hazlerigg vaguely.

They sat in the small waiting room. Five minutes passed.

"You don't think he's walked out on us, do you?" said Pickup anxiously.

"Crabbe will pick him up if he has," said Hazlerigg. "There's only one way out. No, here he comes."

There was the sound of light footsteps tripping down the stairs and a little man came almost dancing in.

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Just inside the door hung a huge framed advertisement of the Consequential Insurance Company, its glass shining. As he passed it the little man paused for a moment to straighten his perfectly straight tie.

"Gentlemen," he said. "I am Mr. Copley. I am very glad to see you."

"Mr. Copley," said Inpector Hazlerigg, "you are not nearly as glad to see me" — Pickup slid unobtrusively between him and the door — "as I am to see you. . . ."

I heard the whole story from Inspector Hazlerigg some time later.

"What was it you spotted in the leases? What did they all have in common?" I asked.

"Well, it wasn't a pinch of dust," said Hazlerigg.

"All right," I said, "don't rub it in. What was it?"

"They all had a clause," said Hazlerigg, "forbidding the tenant to have any sort of pet. Wouldn't have kept the premises neat, you see . . ."

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For more than ten years EQMM has tried to bring you the widest possible diversity of detective, crime, and mystery short stories — every variant we could find that met our double standard of craftsmanship, good writing and superior plotting. So, in the last decade-plus, we have offered you the orthodox tale of crime and detection; the unorthodox tale of murder and deduction (a few of them admittedly "out of left field"); the psychological and psychiatric examples in the gumshoe genre; the simple story, the complicated story, the tour de force; the photographically realistic and the whimsically fantastic; — indeed, everything from the impossible crime and locked-room baffler to the straight cop story and suspense thriller . . .

Now we present one of the very few 'tec types not yet printed in EQMM — the story of crime as written for the so-called "little magazine," with emphasis on literary artistry and modern technique. This particular story first appeared in "Epoch," issue of Winter 1948. The author, John Bell Clayton, had already won First Prize in the O. Henry Awards of 1947, and was destined, in 1952, to receive considerable critical attention with his unusual first novel, SIX ANGELS AT MY BACK. *His second novel,* WAIT, SON, OCTOBER IS NEAR, *was also acclaimed by the critics when it appeared early last year.*

THE ROMAN CANDLES

by JOHN BELL CLAYTON

THEY WERE SHOOTING THE RED ones on the ground and they'd go bang and kick up a shower of snow and they'd shoot the long ones up into the air and they'd go swoosh — swoosh — swoosh — wham — wham — wham and tickle the darkness with their red and purple claws and fall over into the field and I kept running acrost the road and looking into the field and there wouldn't be anything there. Just snow getting in my shoes.

I kept asking them to let me shoot one and they'd say, "No, damn it get away from here you'll blow your hands off." So I kept running acrost the road after they'd explode into the air and getting my feet wet.

One of them he yelled, "You want one, Dooley? There it is right under you!" It went WHAM! and knocked my knees together and there

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was just the hollow sound and then they were all laughing and it wasn't hollow any longer because their laughing it come in and filled it up. And I started laughing and Mr. Lange he run out and he said, "Now damn it I want a stop put to this! What do you want to do, kill him? Now damn it, put a stop to this!" And Mr. Lange he stomped back into the store and one of them he said, "Ah the damned sorehead."

Mr. Pres Cameron he came riding up the road on the black and he had a whole armful of the long ones that tickled the black air with their claws. Mr. Pres Cameron he was laughing, holding in the black with his free hand, and sitting like he was sitting in a rocking chair on his big long front porch. Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Boy!" Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "You! Boy!" Mr. Pres Cameron he was looking at me and he said, "Boy what you standin' out here in the road laughin' at? What's your name?"

One of them he said, "Dooley." Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Dooley what?" One of them he said, "Dooley nothing." Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "I remember him now. Boy, when they going to take you to the sighlum?"

One of them he said, "They won't take him at the sighlum — he ain't bright enough."

I laughed like they were doing. Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Boy, where you living at now?"

One of them he said, "Under there," and Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Under where, for God's sake?"

One of them he said, "Under the store porch in that barrel," and they were all laughing and I kept on laughing and one of them it went swoosh — swoosh — swoosh — wham — wham — wham and I run acrost the road again and there wasn't anything there this time either.

Mr. Pres Cameron he yelled into the store and Mr. Lange he come out and Mr. Pres Cameron (he was still laughing and holding down the black and holding the long ones under his other arm) he says, "Elmer, why don't you take him in the house? Ain't he one of your brood?"

One of them he said, "He won't live in no house. Just there in that big barrel under the store porch."

Mr. Lange he said, "I done told you once before to leave that boy alone. He ain't botherin' you, Pres Cameron."

And Mr. Lange he went on back in the store and they were all quiet except Mr. Pres Cameron.

Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "We're celebratin' Christmas. We're goin' to do it up red, white, and brown." Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Boy, you want to help us celebrate?"

One of them he said, "Dooley can dance like all git out. Let's have Dooley give us a dance."

I started dancing up and down listening to them go swoosh — swoosh swoosh — wham — wham — wham and danced all the way acrost the road to see if there was anything this time and danced back again.

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Mr. Lange he come back to the door and he yelled, "You all leave him be! He's excited enough as it is. Pres Cameron, I'm talkin' to you too. Leave him be, God damn it!"

Mr. Pres Cameron he held down the black and kept on laughing and he said, "Somebody hand me a fistful of them cannon crackers and I'll show you how to make him cavort."

Mr. Pres Cameron he yelled into the store, "Elmer, come out here and I'll show you how to make this woods colt of your'n cut a real caper."

Mr. Lange he come to the door again and he said, "Pres Cameron, that ain't my boy. I don't know whose boy he is. He don't even know himself. But this is the third time I done told you to let him alone and it's the last time."

Mr. Pres Cameron he set on the black and he said, "Down to the mill and back. Get ready — set — go!"

They didn't go swoosh — swoosh — swoosh. There was just a big WHAM at my feet and the snow kicking up and I was dancing and laughing. I danced WHAM clear WHAM down WHAM to the WHAM mill and back. And Mr. Pres Cameron he was on the black about twenty feet behind me.

And when we got back they were all laughing and Mr. Pres Cameron he was laughing the loudest and I tried to see if I could laugh louder than him and I'd laugh louder for a while and then he'd whoop louder than me.

Mr. Lange he come to the door, just part way out, and he said, "Pres Cameron, leave him be, you son-of-a —"

They started going swoosh-wham again and I run back and forth across the road and Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Here, let me have them Roman candles and I'll show you how our boys chased the Japs off'n Okinawa." Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Boy, put the fan on," and I started dancing down toward the mill and I could hear them going swoosh — swoosh — swoosh and then the wham — wham — wham against the seat of my pants and my shoulders and I couldn't see them and I ducked and turned around to try to see their red and purple claws tearing at the dark hair and then I had to grab my face and scream and keep on screaming and wallow and wallow in the snow.

They took me back up on the store porch and one of them he said, "Pres, you done put his eye out."

Mr. Pres Cameron he had done got down off the black and he said, "What'n hell did he turn around for?" Mr. Pres Cameron he said, "Boy! Boy! Listen to me. I'll pay for havin' that eye fixed, understand? I'll pay the doctor bill. Stop that damn screamin'!"

Mr. Lange he come to the door and he said, "Pres!" and the one he had in his hand went wham — wham — wham — wham — wham — wham six times, as fast as he could shoot and Mr. Pres Cameron he fell back off the porch almost under the black and he wasn't talking or laughing or doing nothing.

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Life Is Real! Life Is Earnest!

After a grueling apprenticeship in the school of hard knocks, Jack London had his first story — "To the Man on Trail" — published in the January 1899 issue of "Overland Monthly" (founded in San Francisco by Bret Harte in 1868). For all his worldly experience, Jack London was still a surprisingly young man. He was only twenty-three, but his professional debut brought more than a breath of fresh air to the American literary scene. A new vitality had appeared — a new virility and vigor which the passing years, a whole half century of them, have barely diminished. Today Jack London is still one of the most widely translated of American authors — indeed, more widely translated and published than he was in 1913 when he was considered the best-known, highest paid, and most popular writer in the United States, if not in the world. His finest books (MARTIN EDEN, THE SEA WOLF, THE IRON HEEL, *and* THE CALL OF THE WILD, *to list only a few) are still alive and kicking, and some of them are as solid and substantial contributions to American literature as they ever were — perhaps even greater in stature than when they were first written.*

As much as any other American writer, Jack London wrote out of personal, first-hand experience. He lived most of his stories before he put them into words. Think back to his astonishing career; first, jack-of-odd-jobs on newspaper routes, ice wagons, in bowling alleys, canneries, and jute mills; then, oyster pirate, deputy of the Fish Patrol, deepsea sailor, longshoreman, seal hunter, coal shoveler, tramp, "Boy Socialist," gold miner, war correspondent, and finally — the whole equal to more than the sum of the parts — WRITER. When Jack London joined the Alaska gold rush, he carried over Chilkoot Pass copies of precious books — Darwin's ORIGIN OF SPECIES, *Spencer's* PHILOSOPHY OF STYLE, *Marx's* DAS KAPITAL, *and Milton's* PARADISE LOST. *This was only an infinitesimal part of his voracious reading, his unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Another of his intellectual grandparents was Nietzsche, from whom he accepted the doctrine of the superman — a constantly recurring theme in London's work. And his literary gods were Kipling and Stevenson, those great British writers who combined strength and sensitivity, in substance and style — London's own writing goals.*

And what manner of man was this beloved Jack? What were the facets in his character and personality? Well, he was spontaneous, enthusiastic,

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impatient, reckless, impetuous, swaggering, bluff, honest, noisy, often crude, credulous and gullible — yet tough inside, where it counts most, loyal and generous to a fault, and an irrepressible optimist. All told, Jack London was a lot of man — and even after 50 years of perspective, a lot of writer . . .

When we edited O. Henry's COPS AND ROBBERS, *most readers and critics were amazed to discover the variety and scope of O. Henry's contribution to the detective-crime field. And now we think most of you will be equally startled to learn how many tales of detection, crime, and mystery Jack London wrote. For the story we bring you now is the first of a series of Jack London tales in the detective-crime genre — the first of ten, to be succeeded by another group of ten, if you like these tales half as much as we think you will. Jack London will take you on a thrilling 'tec tour — on the sun-dog trail of adventure, following the scarlet thread of violence in Alaska, in the villages bordering the polar seas, in Hawaii, New Caledonia, and Tahiti, into the Pacific by way of Cape Horn, into the Northland and Southland, into the East and West . . .*

Let's start with Sitka Charley and travel up the Klondike, up to Bonanza and Eldorado, over to Indian River, to Sulphur Creek . . . on the trail of the unknown . . .

A PIECE OF LIFE

by JACK LONDON

SITKA CHARLEY SMOKED HIS PIPE and gazed thoughtfully at the *Police Gazette* illustration on the wall. For half an hour he had been steadily regarding it, and for half an hour I had been slyly watching him. Something was going on in that Indian mind of his, and, whatever it was, I knew it was well worth knowing.

We had struck this deserted cabin after a hard day on trail. The dogs had been fed, the supper dishes washed, the beds made, and we were now enjoying that most delicious hour that comes each day, and but once each day on the Alaskan trail — the hour when nothing intervenes between the tired body and bed save the smoking of the evening pipe. Some former denizen of the cabin had decorated its walls with illustrations torn from magazines and news-

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papers, and it was these illustrations that had held Sitka Charley's attention from the moment of our arrival two hours before. He had studied them intently, ranging from one to another and back again, and I could see that there was uncertainty in his mind.

"Well?" I finally broke the silence.

He took the pipe from his mouth and said simply, "I do not understand."

He smoked on again, and again removed the pipe, using it to point at the *Police Gazette* illustration.

"That picture — what does it mean? I do not understand."

I looked at the picture. A man, with a preposterously wicked face, his right hand pressed dramatically to his heart, was falling backward to the floor. Confronting him, with a face that was a composite of destroying angel and Adonis, was a man holding a smoking revolver.

"One man is killing the other man," I said.

"Why?" asked Sitka Charley.

"I do not know," I confessed.

"That picture is all end," he said. "It has no beginning."

"It is life," I said.

"Life has beginning," he objected. "No, I do not understand pictures."

Sitka Charley's disappointment was patent. It was his desire to understand all things that white men understand, and here, in this matter, he failed.

"Pictures are bits of life," I tried to explain. "We paint life as we see it. For instance, Charley, you are coming along the trail. It is night. You see a cabin. The window is lighted. You look through the window for one second, you see something, and you go on your way. Maybe you saw a man writing a letter. You saw something without beginning or end. Nothing happened. Yet it was a bit of life. You remember it afterward. It is like a picture in your memory. The window is the frame of the picture."

For a long time Sitka Charley smoked in silence. He nodded several times, grunted once or twice. Then he knocked the ashes from his pipe, carefully refilled it, and, after a thoughtful pause, lighted it again.

"Then have I, too, seen many pictures of life," he began; "pictures not painted, but seen with the eyes. I have looked at them like through the window at the man writing the letter. I have seen many pieces of life, without beginning, without end, and without understanding."

With a sudden change of position he turned his eyes full upon me and regarded me thoughtfully.

"Look you," he said; "you are a painter-man. How would you paint this which I saw, a picture without beginning, the ending of which I do not understand, a piece of life with the northern lights for a candle and Alaska for a frame?"

"It is a large canvas," I murmured.

But he ignored me, for the picture he had in mind was before his eyes and he was seeing it.

"There are many names for this picture," he said. "But in the picture

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there are many sun-dogs, and it comes into my mind to call it 'The Sun-Dog Trail.' It was a long time ago, the fall of '97, when I saw the woman first time. At Lake Linderman I had one canoe, very good Peterborough canoe. I came over Chilkoot Pass with two thousand letters for Dawson. I was letter carrier. Everybody rush to Klondike at that time. Many people on trail. Many people chop down trees and make boats. Last water, snow in the hair, snow on the ground, ice on the lake, on the river ice in the eddies. Every day more snow, more ice. Maybe one day, maybe three days, maybe six days, any day maybe freeze-up come, then no more water, all ice, everybody walk, Dawson six hundred miles, long time walk. Boat go very quick. Everybody want to go boat. Everybody say, 'Charley, two hundred dollars you take me in canoe,' 'Charley, three hundred dollars,' 'Charley, four hundred dollars.' I say no. I am letter carrier.

"In morning I get to Lake Linderman. I walk all night and am much tired. I cook breakfast, I eat, then I sleep on the beach three hours. I wake up. It is 10 o'clock. Snow is falling. There is wind, much wind that blows fair. Also, there is a woman who sits in the snow alongside. She is white woman, she is young, very pretty, maybe she is twenty years old, maybe twenty-five years old. She look at me. I look at her. She is very tired. She is no dance-woman. I see that right away. She is good woman, and she is very tired.

" 'You are Sitka Charley,' she says. I get up quick and roll blankets so snow does not get inside. 'I go to Dawson,' she says. 'I go in your canoe — how much?'

"I do not want anybody in my canoe. I do not like to say no. So I say, 'One thousand dollars.' Just for fun I say it, so woman cannot come with me; much better than say no. She look at me very hard, then she says, 'When you start?' I say right away. Then she says all right, she will give me one thousand dollars.

"What can I say? I do not want the woman, yet have I given my word that for one thousand dollars she can come. I am surprised. Maybe she make fun, too, so I say, 'Let me see thousand dollars.' And that woman, that young woman, all alone on trail, there in snow, she take out one thousand dollars, in greenbacks, and she put them in my hand. I look at money, I look at her. What can I say? I say, 'No, my canoe very small. There is no room for outfit.' She laugh. She says, 'I am light traveler. This is my outfit.' She kick one small pack in the snow. It is two fur robes, canvas outside, some woman's clothes inside. I pick it up. Maybe thirty-five pounds. I am surprised. She take it away from me. She says, 'Come, let us start.' She carries pack into canoe. What can I say? I put my blankets into canoe. We start.

"And that is the way I saw the woman first time. The wind was fair. I put up small sail. The canoe went very fast; it flew like a bird over the

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high waves. The woman was much afraid. 'What for you come Klondike much afraid?' I ask. She laugh at me, a hard laugh, but she is still much afraid. Also is she very tired. I run canoe through rapids to Lake Bennett. Water very bad, and woman cry out because she is afraid. We go down Lake Bennett, snow, ice, wind like a gale, but woman go to sleep.

"That night we make camp at Windy Arm. Woman sit by fire and eat supper. I look at her. She is pretty. She fix hair. There is much hair, and it is brown, also sometimes it is like gold in the firelight, when she turn her head, so, and flashes come from it like golden fire. The eyes are large and brown, sometimes warm like a candle behind a curtain, sometimes very hard and bright like broken ice when sun shines upon it. When she smile — how can I say? — when she smile I know white man like to kiss her, just like that, when she smile. She never do hard work. Her hands are soft, like baby's hand. She is soft all over, like baby. She is not thin, but round like baby; her arm, her leg, her muscles, all soft and round like baby. Her waist is small, and when she stand up, when she walk, or move her head or arm, it is — I do not know the word — but it is nice to look at, like — maybe I say she is built on lines like good canoe, just like that, and when she move she is like the movement of good canoe sliding through still water or leaping through water when it is white and fast and angry. It is very good to see.

"Why does she come into Klondike, all alone, with plenty of money? I do not know. Next day I ask her. She laugh and says: 'Sitka Charley, that is none of your business. I give you one thousand dollars to take me to Dawson. That only is your business.' Next day after that I ask her what is her name. She laugh, then she says, 'Mary Jones, that is my name.' I do not know her name, but I know all the time that Mary Jones is not her name.

"It is very cold in canoe, and because of cold sometimes she not feel good. Sometimes she feel good and she sing. Her voice is like a silver bell, and I feel good all over like when I go into church at Holy Cross Mission, and when she sing I feel strong and paddle like hell. Then she laugh and says, 'You think we get to Dawson before freeze-up, Charley?' Sometimes she sit in canoe and is thinking far away, her eyes all empty. She does not see Sitka Charley, nor the ice, nor the snow. Sometimes, when she is thinking far away, her face is not good to see.

"Last day to Dawson very bad. Shore-ice in all the eddies, mush-ice in the stream. I cannot paddle. The canoe freeze to ice. I cannot get to shore. There is much danger. All the time we go down Yukon in the ice. That night there is much noise of ice. Then ice stop, canoe stop, everything stop. 'Let us go to shore,' the woman says. I say no, better wait. By and by, everything start downstream again. There is much snow. I cannot see. At 11 o'clock at night everything stop.

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At 1 o'clock everything start again. At 3 o'clock everything stop. Canoe is smashed like eggshell, but is on top of ice and cannot sink. I hear dogs howling. We wait. We sleep. By and by morning come. There is no more snow. It is the freeze-up, and there is Dawson. Canoe smash and stop right at Dawson. Sitka Charley has come in with two thousand letters on very last water.

"The woman rent a cabin on the hill, and for one week I see her no more. Then, one day, she come to me. 'Charley,' she says, 'how do you like to work for me? You drive dogs, make camp, travel with me.' I say that I make too much money carrying letters. She says, 'Charley, I will pay you more money.' I tell her that pick-and-shovel man get fifteen dollars a day in the mines. She says, 'That is four hundred and fifty dollars a month.' And I say, 'Sitka Charley is no pick-and-shovel man.' Then she says, 'I understand, Charley. I will give you seven hundred and fifty dollars each month.' It is a good price, and I go to work for her. I buy for her dogs and sled. We travel up Klondike, up Bonanza and Eldorado, over to Indian River, to Sulphur Creek, to Dominion, back across divide to Gold Bottom and to Too Much Gold, and back to Dawson. All the time she look for something, I do not know what. I am puzzled. 'What thing you look for?' I ask. She laugh. 'You look for gold?' I ask. She laugh. Then she says, 'That is none of your business, Charley.' And after that I never ask any more.

"She has a small revolver which she carries in her belt. Sometimes, on trail, she makes practice with revolver. I laugh. 'What for you laugh, Charley?' she ask. 'What for you play with that?' I say. 'It is no good. It is too small. It is for a child, a little plaything.' When we get back to Dawson she ask me to buy good revolver for her. I buy a Colt's .44. It is very heavy, but she carry it in her belt all the time.

"At Dawson comes the man. Which way he come I do not know. Only do I know he is *che-cha-quo* — what you call tenderfoot. His hands are soft, just like hers. He never do hard work. He is soft all over. At first I think maybe he is her husband. But he is too young. Also, they make two beds at night. He is maybe twenty years old. His eyes blue, his hair yellow, he has a little mustache which is yellow. His name is John Jones. Maybe he is her brother. I do not know. I ask questions no more. Only I think his name not John Jones. Other people call him Mr. Girvan. I do not think that is his name, either. I do not think her name is Miss Girvan, which other people call her. I think nobody know their names.

"One night I am asleep at Dawson. He wake me up. He says, 'Get the dogs ready; we start.' No more do I ask questions, so I get the dogs ready and we start. We go down the Yukon. It is night-time, it is November, and it is very cold — sixty-five below. She is soft. He is soft. The cold bites. They get tired. They cry under their

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breaths to themselves. By and by I say better we stop and make camp. But they say they will go on. Three times I say better to make camp and rest, but each time they say they will go on. After that I say nothing. All the time, day after day, is it that way. They are very soft. They get stiff and sore. They do not understand moccasins, and their feet hurt very much. They limp, they stagger like drunken people, they cry under their breaths; and all the time they say, 'On! on! We will go on!'

"They are like crazy people. All the time do they go on and on. Why do they go on? I do not know. Only do they go on. What are they after? I do not know. They are not after gold. There is no stampede. Besides, they spend plenty of money.

"We make Circle City. That for which they look is not there. I think now we will rest, and rest the dogs. But we do not rest, not for one day do we rest. 'Come,' says the woman to the man, 'let us go on.' And we go on. We leave the Yukon. We cross the divide to the west and swing down into the Tanana Country. There are new diggings there. But that for which they look is not there, and we take the back trail to Circle City.

"It is a hard journey. December is most gone. The days are short. It is very cold. One morning it is seventy below zero. 'Better that we do not travel today,' I say, 'else will the frost be unwarmed in the breathing and bite all the edges of our lungs. After that we will have bad cough, and maybe next spring will come pneumonia.' But they are *che-cha-quo*. They do not understand the trail. They are like dead people they are so tired, but they say, 'Let us go on.' We go on. The frost bites their lungs, and they get the dry cough. They cough till the tears run down their cheeks. When bacon is frying they must run away from the fire and cough half an hour in the snow. They freeze their cheeks a little bit, so that the skin turns black and is very sore. Also, the man freezes his thumb till the end is like to come off, and he must wear a large thumb on his mitten to keep it warm. And sometimes, when the frost bites hard and the thumb is very cold, he must take off the mitten and put the hand between his legs next to the skin, so that the thumb get warm again.

"We limp into Circle City, and even I, Sitka Charley, am tired. It is Christmas Eve. I dance, drink, make a good time, for tomorrow is Christmas Day and we will rest. But no. It is 5 o'clock in the morning — Christmas morning. I am two hours asleep. The man stand by my bed. 'Come, Charley,' he says, 'harness the dogs. We start.'

"Have I not said that I ask questions no more? They pay me seven hundred and fifty dollars each month. I am their man. So I harness the dogs, and we start down the Yukon. Where do we go? They do not say. Only do they say, 'On! on! We will go on!'

"They are very weary. They have traveled many hundreds of miles, and

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they do not understand the way of the trail. Besides, their cough is very bad — the dry cough that makes strong men swear and weak men cry. But they go on. Every day they go on. Never do they rest the dogs. Always do they buy new dogs. At every camp, at every post, at every Indian village, do they cut out the tired dogs and put in fresh dogs. They have much money, money without end, and like water they spend it. They are crazy? Sometimes I think so, for there is a devil in them that drives them on and on, always on. What is it that they try to find?

"We pass Fort Yukon. We pass Fort Hamilton. We pass Ninook. January has come and nearly gone. The days are very short. At 9 o'clock comes daylight. At 3 o'clock comes night. And it is cold. Will we go on forever this way without end? I do not know. But always do I look along the trail for that which they try to find. Sometimes we travel one hundred miles and never see a sign of life. There is no sound. Sometimes it snows, and we are like wandering ghosts. Sometimes it is clear, and at midday the sun looks at us for a moment over the hills to the south. The northern lights flame in the sky, and the sun-dogs dance, and the air is filled with frost-dust.

"I am Sitka Charley, a strong man. I was born on the trail, and all my days have I lived on the trail. And yet have these two made me very tired. If I am lean like a starved cat, they are lean like cats that have never eaten and have died. Their eyes are sunk deep in their heads, bright sometimes as with fever, dim and cloudy sometimes like the eyes of the dead. Their cheeks are hollow like caves in a cliff. Sometimes it is the woman in the morning who says, 'I cannot get up. I cannot move. Let me die.' And it is the man who stands beside her and says, 'Come, let us go on.' And they go on. And sometimes it is the man who cannot get up, and the woman says, 'Come, let us go on.' But the one thing they do, and always do, is go on. Always they go on.

"Sometimes, at the trading posts, the man and woman get letters. I do not know what is in the letters. But it is the scent that they follow. One time an Indian gives them a letter. I talk with him privately. He says it is a man with one eye who gives him the letter, a man who travels fast down the Yukon. That is all.

"It is February, and we have traveled fifteen hundred miles. We are getting near Bering Sea, and there are storms and blizzards. The going is hard. We come to Anvig. I do not know, but I think sure they get a letter at Anvig, for they are much excited, and they say, 'Come, hurry, let us go on.' But I say we must buy grub, and they say we must travel light and fast. Also, they say that we can get grub at Charley McKeon's cabin. Then do I know they take the big cut-off, for it is there that Charley McKeon lives, where the Black Rock stands by the trail.

"Before we start I talk maybe two

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minutes with the priest at Anvig. Yes, there is a man with one eye who has gone by and who travels fast. And I know that for which they look is the man with the one eye.

"We leave Anvig with little grub, and travel light and fast. There are three fresh dogs bought in Anvig, and we travel very fast. The man and woman are like mad. We start earlier in the morning, we travel later at night. I look sometimes to see them die, these two baby wolves, but they will not die. They go on and on.

"Even I, Sitka Charley, am greatly weary, and I think seven hundred and fifty dollars is a cheap price for the labor I do. We take the big cut-off, and the trail is fresh. The baby wolves have their noses down to the trail, and they say, 'Hurry!' All the time do they say, 'Hurry! Faster! Faster!' It is hard on the dogs. We have not much food and we cannot give them enough to eat, and they grow weak. Also, they must work hard. The woman has true sorrow for them, and often, because of them, the tears are in her eyes. But the devil in her that drives her on will not let her stop and rest the dogs.

"And then we come upon the man with the one eye. He is in the snow by the trail, and his leg is broken. Because of the leg he has made a poor camp, and has been lying on his blankets for three days and keeping a fire going. When we find him he is swearing. He swears like hell. Never have I heard a man swear like that man. I am glad. Now that they have found that for which they look, we will have rest. But the woman says, 'Let us start. Hurry!'

"I am surprised. But the man with the one eye says, 'Never mind me. Give me your grub. You will get more grub at McKeon's cabin tomorrow. Send McKeon back for me. But you go on.' Here is another wolf, an old wolf, and he, too, thinks but the one thought, to go on. So we give him our grub, which is not much, and we chop wood for his fire, and we take his strongest dogs, and go on. We left the man with one eye there in the snow, and he died there in the snow, for McKeon never went back for him. And who that man was, and why he came to be there, I do not know. But I think he was greatly paid by the man and the woman, like me, to do their work for them.

"That day and that night we had nothing to eat, and all next day we traveled fast, and we were weak with hunger. Then we came to the Black Rock, which rose five hundred feet above the trail. It was at the end of the day. Darkness was coming, and we could not find the cabin of McKeon. We slept hungry, and in the morning looked for the cabin. It was not there, which was a strange thing, for everybody knew that McKeon lived in a cabin at Black Rock. We were near to the coast, where the wind blows hard and there is much snow. Everywhere there were small hills of snow where the wind had piled it up. I have a thought, and I dig in one and another of the hills of

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snow. Soon I find the walls of the cabin, and I dig down to the door. I go inside. McKeon is dead. Maybe two or three weeks he is dead. A sickness had come upon him so that he could not leave the cabin. The wind and the snow had covered the cabin. He had eaten his grub and died. I looked for his cache, but there was no grub in it.

"'Let us go on,' says the woman. Her eyes were hungry, and her hand was upon her heart, as with the hurt of something inside. She bent back and forth like a tree in the wind as she stood there. 'Yes, let us go on,' says the man. His voice was hollow, like the *klonk* of an old raven, and he was hunger-mad. His eyes were like live coals of fire, and as his body rocked to and fro, so rocked his soul inside. And I, too, say, 'Let us go on.' For that one thought, laid upon me like a lash for every mile of fifteen hundred miles, had burned itself into my soul, and I think that I, too, was mad. Besides, we could only go on, for there was no grub. And we went on, giving no thought to the man with the one eye in the snow.

"There is little travel on the big cut-off. Sometimes two or three months and nobody goes by. The snow had covered the trail, and there was no sign that men had ever come or gone that way. All day the wind blew and the snow fell, and all day we traveled, while our stomachs gnawed their desire and our bodies grew weaker with every step they took. Then the woman began to fall. Then the man. I did not fall, but my feet were heavy and I caught my toes and stumbled many times.

"That night is the end of February. I kill three ptarmigan with the woman's revolver, and we are made somewhat strong again. But the dogs have nothing to eat. They try to eat their harness, which is of leather and walrus-hide, and I must fight them off with a club and hang all the harness in a tree. And all night they howl and fight around that tree. But we do not mind. We sleep like dead people, and in the morning get up like dead people out of their graves and go on along the trail.

"That morning is the first of March, and on that morning I see the first sign of that after which the baby wolves are in search. It is clear weather, and cold. The sun stay longer in the sky, and there are sun-dogs flashing on either side, and the air is bright with frost-dust. The snow falls no more upon the trail, and I see the fresh sign of dogs and sled. There is one man with that outfit, and I see in the snow that he is not strong. He, too, has not enough to eat. The young wolves see the fresh sign, too, and they are much excited. 'Hurry!' they say. All the time they say, 'Hurry! Faster, Charley, faster!'

"We make hurry very slow. All the time the man and the woman fall down. When they try to ride on sled the dogs are too weak, and the dogs fall down. Besides, it is so cold that if they ride on the sled they will freeze. It is very easy for a hungry man to

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freeze. When the woman fall down, the man help her up. Sometimes the woman help the man up. By and by both fall down and cannot get up, and I must help them up all the time, else they will not get up and will die there in the snow. This is very hard work, for I am greatly weary, and as well I must drive the dogs, and the man and woman are very heavy with no strength in their bodies. So, by and by, I, too, fall down in the snow, and there is no one to help me up. I must get up by myself. And always do I get up by myself, and help them up, and make the dogs go on.

"That night I get one ptarmigan, and we are very hungry. And that night the man says to me, 'What time start tomorrow, Charley?' It is like the voice of a ghost. I say, 'All the time you make start at 5 o'clock.' 'Tomorrow,' he says, 'we will start at 3 o'clock.' I laugh in great bitterness, and I say, 'You are dead man.' And he says, 'Tomorrow we will start at 3.'

"And we start at 3 o'clock, for I am their man, and that which they say is to be done, I do. It is clear and cold, and there is no wind. When daylight comes we can see a long way off. And it is very quiet. We can hear no sound but the beat of our hearts, and in the silence that is a very loud sound. We are like sleep-walkers, and we walk in dreams until we fall down; and then we know we must get up, and we see the trail once more and hear the beating of our hearts. Sometimes, when I am walking in dreams this way, I have strange thoughts. Why does Sitka Charley live? I ask myself. Why does Sitka Charley work hard, and go hungry, and have all this pain? For seven hundred and fifty dollars a month, I make the answer, and I know it is a foolish answer. Also is it a true answer. And after that never again do I care for money.

"In the morning we come upon the last-night camp of the man who is before us. It is a poor camp, the kind a man makes who is hungry and without strength. On the snow there are pieces of blanket and of canvas, and I know what has happened. His dogs have eaten their harness, and he has made new harness out of his blankets. The man and woman stare hard at what is to be seen, and as I look at them my back feels the chill as of a cold wind against the skin. Their eyes are toil-mad and hunger-mad and burn like fire deep in their heads. Their faces are like the faces of people who have died of hunger, and their cheeks are black with the dead flesh of many freezings. 'Let us go on,' says the man. But the woman coughs and falls in the snow. It is the dry cough where the frost has bitten the lungs. For a long time she coughs, then like a woman crawling out of her grave she crawls to her feet. The tears are ice upon her cheeks, and her breath makes a noise as it comes and goes, and she says, 'Let us go on.'

"We go on. And we walk in dreams through the silence, and we see the snow and the mountains and the fresh trail of the man who is before us, and we know all our pain again. We come

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to where we can see a long way over the snow, and that for which they look is before them.

"A mile away there are black spots upon the snow. The black spots move. My eyes are dim, and I must stiffen my soul to see. And I see one man with dogs and a sled. The baby wolves see, too. They can no longer talk, but they whisper, 'On, on. Let us hurry!'

"And they fall down, but they go on. The man who is before us, his blanket harness breaks often, and he must stop and mend it. Our harness is good, for I have hung it in trees each night. At 11 o'clock the man is half mile away. At 1 o'clock he is a quarter mile away. He is very weak. We see him fall down many times in the snow. One of his dogs can no longer travel, and he cuts it out of the harness. But he does not kill it. I kill it with the axe as I go by, as I kill one of my dogs which loses its legs and can travel no more.

"Now we are three hundred yards away. We go very slow. Maybe in two, three hours we go one mile. We do not walk. All the time we fall down. We stand up and stagger two steps, maybe three steps, then we fall down again. And all the time I must help up the man and woman. Sometimes they rise to their knees and fall forward, maybe four or five times before they can get to their feet again and stagger two or three steps and fall. But always they fall forward. Standing or kneeling, always they fall forward, gaining on the trail each time by the length of their bodies.

"Sometimes they crawl on hands and knees like animals that live in the forest. We go like snails that are dying, yet we go faster than the man who is before us. For he, too, falls all the time, and there is no Sitka Charley to lift him up. Now he is two hundred yards away. After a long time he is one hundred yards away.

"It is a race of dead men and dead dogs. I want to laugh, it is so funny.

"The stranger-man who is before us leaves his dogs behind and goes on alone across the snow. After a long time we come to the dogs. They lie helpless in the snow, their harness of blanket and canvas on them, the sled behind them, and as we pass them they whine to us and cry like babies that are hungry.

"Then we, too, leave our dogs and go on alone across the snow. The man and the woman are nearly gone, and they moan and groan and sob, but they go on. I, too, go on. I have but one thought. It is to come up to the stranger-man. Then it is that I shall rest, and not until then shall I rest, and it seems that I must lie down and sleep for a thousand years, I am so tired.

"The stranger-man is fifty yards away, all alone in the white snow. He falls and crawls, staggers, and falls and crawls again. He is like an animal that is sore wounded and trying to run from the hunter. By and by he crawls on hands and knees. He no longer stands up. And the man and woman no longer stand up. They, too, crawl after him on hands and knees. But I

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stand up. Sometimes I fall, but always do I stand up again.

"It is a strange thing to see. All about is the snow and the silence, and through it crawl the man and the woman, and the stranger-man who crawls before, looking back over his shoulder.

"After a long time the stranger-man crawls no more. He stands slowly upon his feet and rocks back and forth. Also he take off one mitten and wait with revolver in his hand, rocking back and forth as he waits. His face is skin and bones and frozen black. The eyes are deep-sunk in his head, and the lips are snarling. The man and woman, too, get upon their feet and they go toward him very slowly. And all about is the snow and the silence. And in the sky are three suns, and all the air is flashing with the dust of diamonds.

"And thus it was that I, Sitka Charley, saw the baby wolves make their kill. No word is spoken. Only does the stranger-man snarl with his frozen face. Also does he rock to and fro, his shoulders drooping, his knees bent, and his legs wide apart so that he does not fall down. The man and the woman stop maybe fifty feet away. Their legs, too, are wide apart so that they do not fall down, and their bodies rock to and fro. The stranger-man is very weak. His arm shakes, so that when he shoots at the man his bullet strikes in the snow. The man cannot take off his mitten. The stranger-man shoots at him again, and this time the bullet goes by in the air. Then the man takes the mitten in his teeth and pulls it off. But his hand is frozen and he cannot hold the revolver, and it falls in the snow. I look at the woman. Her mitten is off, and the big Colt's revolver is in her hand.

"Three times she shoot, quick, just like that.

"The hungry face of the stranger-man is still snarling as he falls forward into the snow.

"They do not look at the dead man. 'Let us go on,' they say. And we go on. But now that they have found that for which they look, they are like dead. The last strength has gone out of them. They can stand no more upon their feet. They will not crawl, but desire only to close their eyes and sleep. I see not far away a place for camp. I kick them. I have my dog-whip, and I give them the lash of it. They cry aloud, but they must crawl. And they crawl to the place for camp. I build fire so that they will not freeze. Then I go back for sled. Also, I kill the dogs of the stranger-man so that we may have food and not die. I put the man and woman in blankets and they sleep. Sometimes I wake them and give them little bit of food. They are not awake, but they take the food. The woman sleep one day and a half. Then she wake up and go to sleep again. The man sleep two days and wake up and go to sleep again.

"After that we go down to the coast at St. Michaels. And when the ice goes out of Bering Sea, the man and woman go away on a steamship. But first they pay me my seven hun-

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dred and fifty dollars a month. Also, they make me a present of one thousand dollars. And that was the year that Sitka Charley gave much money to the Mission at Holy Cross."

"But why did they kill the man?" I asked.

Sitka Charley delayed reply until he had lighted his pipe. He glanced at the *Police Gazette* illustration and nodded his head at it familiarly. Then he said, speaking slowly and ponderingly:

"I have thought much. I do not know. It is something that happened. It is a picture I remember. It is like looking in at the window and seeing the man writing a letter. The picture is as I have said, without beginning, the end without understanding."

"You have painted many pictures in the telling," I said.

"Ay," he nodded his head. "But they were without beginning and without end."

"The last picture of all had an end," I said.

"Ay," he answered. "But what end?"

"It was a piece of life," I said.

"Ay," he answered. "It was a piece of life."

NEXT MONTH . . .

The winner of the $2,000 First Prize in our 1953 contest:

Roy Vickers's DOUBLE IMAGE

plus 3 other 1953 prize-winners:

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A typical Woolrich thriller-diller à la **Black Mask Magazine . . .**

THE LAST BUS HOME

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

SHE HAPPENED TO LOOK DOWN there, at the sidewalk in front of her rooming house, and he was still hanging around, that young fellow who had brought her home before. As though he didn't know where to go, or was afraid to go back to wherever it was he belonged.

It got her sore. She thought maybe it was on her account he was hanging around like that. She threw open the window and called down: "Why don't you go home?"

He looked up at her, and didn't seem to know what to say. Then suddenly a white-roofed patrol car slithered around the corner down at the lower end of the street and started up that way. It wasn't going anywhere in particular, just cruising; you could tell by its lackadaisical gait. He gave that nervous start again, as he had when coming home with her, and before she knew it, he'd ducked into her doorway and taken cover.

First she was going to hail the patrol car and have them investigate and tell him to move on. Afterwards, she was glad she didn't. All her life she was glad she didn't. It coasted by, and its occupants didn't even glance over at the house. Then it turned the upper corner and disappeared again.

She stood there in the open window, waiting for him to come out again. He didn't. He stayed out of sight inside there some place. Well, he wasn't going to get away with that. She wasn't going to have him lurking in the hall all night. She crossed the room, threw open the door, went out to the head of the dimly lit stairs, and peered down the well.

She saw him down there. He was sitting disconsolately on the stairs, halfway between the ground floor and the first landing. She saw him run his fingers through his hair a couple of times, as though some deep-seated predicament was gnawing at him.

That influenced her a little, softened her original idea of a raucous tirade. "Hey, you down there!" she called. "I want to talk to you!"

He sprang to his feet, cleared the intervening three-and-a-half flights in an almost noiseless sprint that showed how welcome the sanctuary was.

She waited until he'd joined her in the upper hall, then returned to her room. "Better come inside a minute, so we won't be heard. I've got some

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coffee on the gas ring. You can have a cup with me." And then as he took off his hat and closed the room door on the two of them, she warned: "But keep your thinking clear. This is no invitation to a 2 o'clock date!"

"I know," he said gratefully, edging down beside the table she'd started her letter writing on before. "Anyone can tell just by looking at you —"

"You'd be surprised how many near-sighted bozos there are!" She picked up the little tin pot to pour from it, and the heat made the envelope she'd addressed to her mother stick to the bottom of it. He freed it, glanced at it as he was about to put it aside. Then he sort of hitched, as though a drop of the hot liquid she was pouring had spattered him.

"Glen Falls, *Iowa?* Is that where you're from originally?"

"Yeah, why?"

"That's where I'm from, too! That's my hometown! I only came away six months ago —"

She wasn't believing him right away. She put down the pot, stared at him searchingly. "What street did you live on there?" She watched his face closely. He didn't have to stop to think twice.

"Anderson Avenue, between Pine and Oak, the second house down from —" He stopped short, scrutinizing the aghast look on her face. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, my gosh! D'you know where I lived? On Emmet Road! That's the street behind yours. Our two houses must have been practically back to back. How is it we never knew one another back there?"

"We only moved in after my dad died, a little over two years ago."

"I'd come here to the city by that time," she said.

"But right now, my folks must already know your folks back there — back-fence neighbors."

They spoke about it, their hometown, for a while, in low voices, eyes dreamily lidded. The Paramount clock, riding the night sky outside the window, seemed very far away. They could amost hear the steeple bell of the little white church down by the square in Glen Falls toll the hour instead. "Do you remember the Elite Movie, down on Main Street?"

"And Pop Gregory's candy store?"

"Folks saying good morning to you from across the street, even if they'd never set eyes on you before in their life. Morning glories on the porch lattices —"

"And look at us now." Her head dropped into her folded arms on the tabletop.

He watched the shaking of her shoulders for a while. Then when she'd looked up again, trying to smile, trying to pretend her eyes weren't wet, he asked: "Why don't you go back?"

"Because I didn't make good. They think I'm in a big Broadway production. I've tried to go back, over and over. I've priced the fare. I've inquired until I know the bus schedule by heart. There's only one through

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bus a day, and it leaves at 6 in the morning. The evening one, you have to stop overnight in Chicago. And overnight you lose your nerve."

She stopped. "I've never had the courage to face them all and admit that I'm a flop. Once I even got as far as the terminal, bag all packed, and then I backed out. The city has a half-nelson on me. The city's bad; it gets you down. Maybe the reason I wasn't able to give it the slip was because I was all alone, maybe if I had someone going back home with me, someone to grab me by the arm when I tried to back out, I wouldn't weaken."

His face tightened up. "I wish I'd met you yesterday." He drew an imaginary boundary line across the table with the edge of his hand. She knew what he meant. He'd done something he shouldn't, since yesterday, and now he couldn't go back. She waited a long time, then finally she said, in a husky voice: "They're after you, aren't they?"

"They will be, by about 9 or 10 in the morning." He started to tell her about it, maybe because she was from his hometown and he had to tell someone. She was the girl next door, the one he would have told his troubles to if they were both still back home. "My name's Bowder — Frank Bowder."

"I'm Carol Warren," she said.

He fumbled in the lining of his coat, unpinned a slit that looked as though it had been made purposely, with a razor blade or knife. He worked slim sheafs of rubber-banded currency free through it, with probing fingers. Large bills, twenties and fifties and even some hundreds. It took him some time. When he had them all spread out on the table, there was $1480 there.

"I had a job as an electrician's helper until a couple months ago, then I lost it. When I saw that I couldn't get another right away, I should have gone back home while I still had the fare. Or written them for money. But I was like you, I guess; I hated to admit I was licked. One of the places my boss and I had been called in to do repair work was a swanky private house over on East Seventieth.

"Someone must have left their front-door latch key lying around loose while we were in there working, and it got mixed up with my kit. I carried it out with me by mistake. I don't know how it happened, but I swear I didn't do it purposely. I only noticed it in there with the rest of my work things when I got back to the shop. I meant to drop around the next day and return it to them, but I was on the jump from 7 in the morning until late at night, and first thing, I forgot it.

"Then I was laid off, and my money all went, and — Well, yesterday I got out my kit and looked it over, thinking maybe I could get something on it at a hock shop. I saw the key and remembered where it had come from. So I went back there with it; all that was in my mind was that maybe

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they'd give me a little work to do, even if it was only fixing a lamp socket.

"I kept ringing away, and no one answered. I started to leave — and how I wish I'd gone home again — and then a delivery boy, who saw me turning away from the door, told me they'd all gone to their country place for the summer the week before. They hadn't boarded up the house yet, because the oldest son had stayed behind to finish up some business; he was supposed to follow them a week later.

"I walked around the block with the key in my pocket, and I kept fighting the idea. I even tried to drop the key into a rubbish can, to overcome the temptation. But I weakened and went back and picked it up again. I hadn't eaten right for two weeks, and I hadn't eaten anything for a whole day. I'd seen the wall safe in there when my boss and I were doing the job — in fact, that was what we'd been wiring up — and I knew by the looks of the house and by the things that were said that it had plenty in it.

"So I came back around the corner, and I rang the bell one last time. The son who had stayed in town was obviously not home. I used the key and I went in. It was my first attempt at anything like that, but it was easy, because my boss and I had worked around that very safe. I didn't have to fiddle with the combination or anything. I chopped a hole through the plaster in the room behind — the bath — big enough to dislodge one of the wooden panels lining the safe and squeeze the cash box out backwards. It was an old-fashioned safe; only the lid and the frame were steel. The lining that the cash box fitted into was wood."

He indicated the money on the table ruefully. "I only took the cash; 1500 even. I left the jewelry and the securities they had in it. I cleaned the chipped plaster up off the floor, and I put the cash box back, and I spread out the shower curtain a little, so that it covered the hole. He'll discover it by about 9 or 10 in the morning, when he swings the curtain around him to take his bath. And probably the errand boy'll remember seeing some fellow ringing the doorbell earlier in the evening. I didn't try to run out of town because —"

He shrugged hopelessly. "If they're going to get you, they'll get you just as quickly, no matter where you go, as if you'd stayed here." He sat there staring down at the floor with a puzzled, defeated smile on his face.

Something about that got her. The boy next door, she thought poignantly. He came here to do big things, to lick the town, but now instead, the town had licked him. Back home his folks probably read his letters across the back fence to her folks, bragged about how good he was doing. And her folks read her letters and bragged back. He shouldn't end up like this, hunted up and down the streets, never knowing when a hand was going to fall on his shoulder from behind.

"Listen," she said, hitching her

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chair forward. "I've got a proposition for you. What d'you say we both go back where we belong, get our second wind, give ourselves another chance? Both get on that 6 o'clock bus that I was never able to make alone."

"They'd only be waiting to grab me when I get off at the other end, and I'd drag you into it —"

"Not if nothing's missing, if nothing's been taken. What would there be to grab you for? Have you still got the key?"

He felt in his pocket. "Yeah."

She riffled the money together, thrust it into his hand. "How much have you blown already?"

"Twenty bucks. After I had it, I found out I didn't know what to do with it. A five-buck meal, and fifteen dollars' worth of dance checks up at your place —"

She jumped up, ran over to the cot, half-dismantled it, thrust her hand into a gap along the seam, brought something out. "Here's the twenty bucks to complete the amount you originally took. You can pay me back after we get home and you're working again. And I've still got enough left to take care of both our bus tickets. You can pay me that back, too —"

"I can't let you get tangled up in this —"

She put on her best dancehall armor, sliced her hand at him. "I'm doing the talking, and I don't want to hear any arguments. Hurry up, you've still got time. You got in once. You can get in twice — to put back what you took out the first time. A summer bachelor, living alone like that in the city without his family — there's an even chance he's stepping out somewhere, won't get back till 3:30 or even 4 —" She hurried over to the window, squinted out at the Paramount clock in the near distance. "And you can still make it. You've still got a fighting chance. It's only —"

They came down the rickety stairs one behind the other, he in the lead with her battered, latched valise in his hand. It didn't weigh much. It had hardly anything in it — just busted hopes. They came out into the slumbering early-morning street and started hurriedly toward the nearest corner, huddled close together, footsteps echoing hollowly in the before-dawn stillness.

"Goodby, Manhattan," he heard her whisper.

At the corner he stopped, put down the valise a second. "You better go down and wait for me at the bus terminal, while I go over alone about — the other thing."

She tightened her grip on his arm, as if afraid of losing him. "No, if we separated, we're licked. The city'll get its dirty work in. I'll think: 'Can I trust him?' You'll think: 'Can I trust her?' We're staying together. I'm going over there with you. I'll wait outside while you go in."

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"Suppose he's home by now? You're likely to be picked up as an accomplice."

"That's a chance we'll have to take. We're taking it together. Catch a cab; the longer we wait to get it back in that safe, the riskier it gets."

"On your money?"

She smiled benevolently. "This reformation is on me."

Side by side in the taxi, streaking crosstown through the park, he squeezed her hand. "Gee, I'm glad I met you tonight, Carol. You've kept me from turning into a crook."

They got out two blocks from their destination, in order not to reveal it to the driver. They covered the remaining distance on foot, one of his long strides to two of hers, turned into East Seventieth from Fifth Avenue, came to a stop again in the sheltering shadows just beyond the corner.

"It's on this side, just past the second street light down there," he said guardedly, looking all around to make sure they weren't observed. "Don't come any nearer than this, just in case. Wait here with your valise. I'll be back in no time."

"Don't take any chances. If you see any lights, if it looks like he's back already, don't go all the way in — just drop the money inside the door. Let him pick it up in the morning."

He gave his hat brim a tug, moved away from her down the silent street. She watched him go. It was an old-fashioned residence with a high stoop. She saw him glance cautiously around, then go up the steps to the entrance. He opened the outer glassed doors and went in.

As soon as he had, she picked up her valise and moved after him, in spite of his cautioning. She wanted to stay as near him as she could. When she reached the house, she continued on past it, in order not to draw attention by loitering in front of it.

The vestibule behind the glassed doors showed empty by the reflected street light as she glanced in on her way by. He'd gone in. But suppose the one member of the family who had stayed behind was asleep in there right now? Suppose Frank didn't catch on in time? Suppose the owner's son woke up, discovered him —

She tried to shut the terrifying thought out. Nothing had gone wrong the first time, when he entered on a dishonest errand. Why should anything go wrong this time, when he entered on an honest one? She was well past the house now, in the other direction. She stole a look back. Nothing had happened yet; no outcries, so he hadn't been discovered.

She was trying her best to be calm, but her heart was beating unavoidably faster, as she sauntered along the sidewalk so slowly, so aimlessly. It was still breaking and entering, even to return the money. Maybe Frank should have mailed it back, instead of coming back in person with it. He and she hadn't thought of that; she wished they had, now.

A figure suddenly materialized at the lower corner ahead, on the op-

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posite side from her. It was just barely visible beyond the building line, standing with its back to her. A patrolman on tour. She whisked quickly down into the shelter of one of the shadowed areaways at hand, valise and all. It would have looked too suspicious to be seen loitering on the sidewalk at such an hour, with a piece of luggage in her hand.

If he came up this way — if Frank should come out while he was still down there — Metal clinked faintly as he opened a call-box to report in. Even the blurred sound of his voice reached her on the still night air. The box clashed shut again. She could hear the scrape of his step crossing over, then it faded.

She peered out, and he'd gone on past along the avenue, and was now out of sight. She drew a deep breath, stepped onto the sidewalk again. She turned back the other way, eyeing the inscrutable house front apprehensively as she neared it. What was taking him so long in there? What had gone wrong? He should have been out by now.

Just as she reached the stoop a second time, the vestibule doors parted noiselessly and he came out. He stood there looking down at her as though he didn't see her. He started down the steps uncertainly, and broke the short descent twice, to stop and look behind him at the doorway he'd just left. He was almost staggering, and when he stood before her at last, his face looked white and taut even in the gloom.

"What's the matter? What're you looking so frightened about?" she whispered hoarsely.

He kept staring blankly in a sort of dazed incomprehension. "He's dead! He's lying in there — dead."

She gave a shuddering intake of breath. "Who — the son?"

"I guess so. I never saw him before." He passed his hand across his brow, under his hat brim.

She made a move toward the bottom step, as if to go up. "No, don't you go in there! Stay out of there!" He gripped her roughly, tried to turn her around. "Hurry up, get out of here! I shouldn't have let you come over here with me. Get your own ticket, climb on the bus, and forget you ever saw me." She struggled against his hold. "Carol, will you listen to me? Get out of here, before they —"

He pushed her to start her on her way. She only swerved, came in closer. "I only want to know one thing. I only want you to tell me one thing. It wasn't you, was it — the first time?"

"No, I only took the money, that was all. He wasn't there. I didn't see him at all. He must have come back since. Carol, you've got to believe me. I swear by — the little town we both want to go back to; I give you my word of honor."

She smiled sadly up at him in the semi-darkness. "I know you didn't, Frank. I should have known without asking. The boy next door, *he'd* never kill anyone."

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"I can't go back with you now. I'm finished. They'll think I did it. They'd only be waiting to get me at the other end, when I go there. And I'd rather have it happen here than there, where everyone knows me. That's why I'll stay here —"

"The city, the city," she breathed vindictively. She drew herself up defiantly beside him. "We're not licked yet. The deadline still holds good. We still have until daylight. They haven't found him yet, or the place'd be full of policemen by this time. No one knows; only us — and whoever did it. Come on, we're going back in there and see if we can figure this thing out. We've got to. It's our only hope. We're fighting for our happiness, Frank; we're fighting for our lives. And we have until 6 o'clock to win out."

They started up the stoop of the house in which a man lay dead. A church belfry somewhere around in the dark bonged the hour.

The key shook a little as he fitted it into the door for the third time that night. They went in. The door receded behind them into a blurred grayish square that was the glass panel set into it. The hall had the stuffy air of a place closed up all day.

"He's in the back, on the floor above," Frank whispered. "I don't want to light any lights in the front. They might be seen from outside."

She could sense rather than see him reaching toward his pocket for something. "No, don't light any matches, either," she cautioned. "You lead the way. I'll follow with my hand on your sleeve."

She set down the valise close against the baseboard of the wall, where she could find it again readily. They toiled forward in a sort of swimming darkness that was almost liquid, it was so dense.

"Step," he whispered.

She felt his sleeve go up. She raised her foot, pawed, found the foremost step with it. The rest of the stairs, followed in automatic succession, were no trouble at all. The stairs creaked once or twice under them in the stealthy silence. She wondered if anyone else was in the house, anyone still alive. For all they knew, someone might be.

"Turn," he whispered.

His arm swung away, to the left. She kept contact, wheeled her body after it. The stairs had flattened out into a landing. She felt his sleeve go up again, after the brief level space. She found the new flight of steps. Finally they, too, leveled off. They were in the upstairs hall now.

"Turn," he breathed.

His sleeve crowded in against her, around toward the right this time. She corrected her own direction accordingly.

She felt herself go over a wooden doorsill, slightly raised. His sleeve stopped. She stopped beside it. He reached behind her and did some-

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thing, and she felt a slight current of air as a door swept by. She heard it close in back of them.

"Get your eyes ready, here go the lights," he warned.

She squinted protectively. The lights flashed on with unbearable brilliance after the long pilgrimage in the dark. The dead man was the most conspicuous thing in the room.

It was a sort of library or den, by the looks of it. One doorway led into a bedroom, the other into a bath. Frank left her to go into the former and draw the heavy, sheltering drapes over the windows, to keep the light from showing through at the rear of the house.

He didn't bother with the bath, so it evidently had no outside window. She stood there staring down in grim fascination until he rejoined her. She'd never seen anyone dead before.

The man was about 35 or so, lying face upward. Even in death he was still immaculately attired in evening clothes, the starched shirt bosom scarcely rumpled at all, the flower in his buttonhole still in place. Only the jacket had sprung open with his backward fall, and a small reddish-black swirl was revealed, marring the expanse of white piqué vest.

She had drawn slowly near, crouched down by him, as if drawn by an irresistible compulsion. "Can you tell what — it was done by?" she asked with bated breath.

He saw her arch her hand timidly above the wound, fingers spread as if trying to undo the vest buttons without coming into contact with it.

"Here, I'll do that for you," he said quickly. "It looks partly burned. It must have been a gun." He undid the buttons, then an inner layer, and peered through without letting her see. He nodded. "Yeah, bullet wound."

"Then we can be sure there's no one else in the house right now, or they would have heard it happen."

He was scanning the room. "Must have taken it out with them; there's no sign of one around."

"What's their name — the people who live in this house?"

"Gadsby."

"This is the son, you said?"

"The older one; there's another, still a student, away at college somewhere. Then there's the mother, well-known society woman, and a couple of debutante sisters. Gadsby senior's dead."

"If we could get at the motive — Was anything taken out of the safe, when you went back to it the second time?"

"I don't know. After I'd stumbled over him, I tossed the money back in, without stopping to look."

"You said there was some jewelry in it. Let's make sure, shall we?"

They went into the bathroom. He had hacked a square opening through the plaster, behind where the safe was, large enough to pass the cash box through. The lining of the safe was only wood paneling. He had removed the rear section first, then brought out the box. He did this now

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a second time and they examined its contents.

"Everything's still there," he murmured. "Nothing's been taken out, since I —"

He was ashamed now, she could see. As dangerous a situation as they were in, his face still had time to color at the recollection of his own former act. That was all to the good; that was the way the boy next door should feel about a thing like that.

They put it back, turned away. Just as he was about to poke the light out, she glanced behind them into the expensive built-in tub. There was a little piece of paper lying in the bottom of it, a little piece of light-blue paper that looked strangely out of place there.

"What's that?" She went back, leaned over, and picked it up. It was a check. Someone's personal check. It was made out to Stephen Gadsby for twelve thousand five hundred dollars. It was endorsed by Stephen Gadsby. It was signed by Arthur Holmes. It was stamped, in damning letters diagonally across the face of it: *Returned — No Funds.*

They exchanged a look, walking back to the other room. "How'd a thing like that get in there?" she puzzled.

"The only way I can figure out is, it must have been in the cash box, and when I pulled it out through here, it slipped out and floated down into the tub without my noticing it."

"Then maybe this Holmes came around here tonight to see him, either to make good on it, or to ask him to delay prosecution until he'd raised enough money to make good on it. Gadsby couldn't find it when he went to look for it. Holmes thought he was trying to put something over on him. They got into an argument about it, and he shot him."

"Then, in a way, I'm still responsible for his death —"

"Forget that. He didn't have to kill him, even if he did think he was holding out the check on him. Have you — looked him over yet?"

He knew what she meant: had he searched him? "No. I was using matches. I didn't even see him, until my foot caught against something. I got out fast, as soon as I'd put the money back."

She conquered her repulsion, knelt down by the motionless form. "Come on, help me go through his pockets."

He dropped down on the opposite side. He didn't say anything, but she could tell by his face he was thinking they didn't have a chance — not in the time left to them.

She reached out across what lay between them, gripped his arm, shook it imploringly. "We *can* figure this out, Frank, we *can!* If we think we can't, if we start saying we can't, then we *never* will!"

A clock on the bookshelf behind them went *tick-tock, tick-tock* mockingly. So fast, so remorselessly. They both kept from turning to look at it by sheer will-power alone.

"Take out everything," she breathed, "no matter what it is."

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They made a sort of audible inventory as they went along, for one another's benefit. "Cigarette case, given to him by somebody with the initial B. Two ticket stubs from the show at the Winter Garden. I wonder who went with him?"

"Business cards. Wait a minute, Holmes was his broker; one of these is his."

"That's funny. Clients usually give checks to their brokers, not the other way around. And a bad one at that."

"Maybe Holmes misappropriated some securities that Gadsby had entrusted to him, and then Gadsby demanded an accounting sooner than he'd expected, so he tried to gain time by foisting a worthless check on him. When that bounced and Gadsby threatened to have him arrested —"

"There's motive enough there for Holmes to have shot him," she agreed. "But we don't even know for sure that Holmes was here tonight —"

"Somebody was." He pitched his thumb toward the opposite side of the room, where a low occasional table was placed in a position accessible to two chairs. "See the two glasses, with tan rings around the bottom? See the two cigar butts in a tray, pointed toward each other?" He went over, took a closer look. "They were having an argument, too. One smoker in particular was excited and upset; one of the butts is chewed to ribbons at the mouth-end."

She resumed the inventory. "Here's his wallet. With a snapshot of himself and a girl in riding togs."

He scanned it. "She's in the bedroom, too, in a silver frame. Signed Barbara."

"Then she didn't do it. If she had, she wouldn't still be in the bedroom in a silver frame."

"That cleans his pockets. And we're still no further than before."

"At least we got two names out of thin air. Holmes and Barbara —"

"*What's that?*"

They both jumped spasmodically. It was unrecognizable at first. It shouldn't have been, but they were both so keyed up, it confused them. It seemed to come from two places at once; faintly from the floor below, and a little clearer from somewhere near at hand, both synchronized.

He identified it first. "It's a telephone fitted with one of those muted bells." He went toward the bedroom entrance, looked in. "There's an extension in here — I see it! Ringing in time with the one below — somebody that doesn't know what's happened, trying to get him. I'm — I'm going to take a chance and answer." He started into the other room.

She flashed after him. Her hand found his wrist, tightened around it, ice-cold. "Don't! We're not supposed to be here. You'll bring the police down on us!"

"And if I don't answer, that'll be an even quicker giveaway. He *is* supposed to be here, but he's not supposed to be dead. This call would wake him, if he were alive. I'll have to pretend I'm he. Maybe I can get away with it."

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"But suppose it's someone that knows his voice?"

"I'll try to make mine sound sleepy, faint, as if I just woke up." He poised his hand above it, ready. "Stand here by me. And keep your fingers crossed for all you're worth!"

He lifted the phone as gingerly as if it were charged with high-voltage electricity. "Hello," he said with somnolent indistinctness.

Her heart was pounding. He listened a minute. Then he hitched his head toward the dresser, for her benefit. She knew what he meant. This was "Barbara," the girl in the silver frame. And Barbara must know Gadsby pretty well, to ring up at such an hour.

His face was white with strain, and she could see a pulse at the base of his throat flickering. He let the caller do most of the talking. He grunted and mouthed little blurred half-words at intervals, to show that he was still listening. "Mn — yeah — um-hum."

Once she heard him say, "I just wanted to tease you," holding his face as far away from the mouthpiece as he could while yet hoping to remain audible. And at the end he said, "Guess I am kind of sleepy, at that. Call you first thing t'morrow."

Then he hung up with a swift thrust of his hand and sort of wavered there, as though he was weak on his pins, wiping the sweat out of his eyes.

"Whew! That was horrible!" he grimaced. "Talking to a dead man's girl, with him lying stark in the very next room!" He drew the back of his hand across his mouth remorsefully.

"They were engaged," he said. "She was his fiancée. At least, she'll have one last good night's sleep before her heart breaks —"

"Did you find out anything?"

"About that?" He motioned toward the next room. "How could I? She doesn't know herself yet. She left him at about half-past 2 or so. She was out with him all evening, and they had a quarrel just before she left him. The call was to try to patch it up with him. She couldn't sleep, she said, until they'd made up again."

"Could you gather what the quarrel was about?"

"Yes. She thought she was rehashing the whole thing with *him*, the way people do, and in that way I got the drift of the whole thing. He took her to the Winter Garden, and then afterwards to the Club La Conga. While they were in there, she thought she caught one of the hostesses, a tall redhead, trying to signal to him behind her back. She paid no attention at first. Then a few minutes later she was sure she detected the waiter palming a note in his hand. She accused him of flirting, and he insisted he didn't know the redhead, had never seen her before in his life. He also denied that he'd just received a note from her. And that started their quarrel. He seemed ill at ease, in a hurry to leave, after that. He saw her to her door, and they parted on the outs."

"If we could only see what was in that note. If we only knew what he did with it."

"Tore it up into pieces, I suppose."

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"No, that would be admitting he *had* gotten one, and he didn't want her to know it. And then once he'd left her, there was no longer any reason to tear it up. She wasn't around to see any more."

"We've turned out all his pockets and it's not in any of them."

She tapped the curve of her lower lip thoughtfully. "Frank, you're a man. Just suppose you were sitting at a table with a girl you were engaged to, and got a note from a stranger you didn't want her to see. What would you be likely to do with it? Answer quick now, without taking too long to think it out —"

"Reach down under the tablecloth and shove it in at the side of my shoe, most likely."

She turned and went out into the other room without a word. By the time he had followed, she was crouched down by the still form in there, her back toward him. Something thudded. By the time she had straightened and turned toward him, she was smoothing and starting to read a crumpled slip of paper. She handed it to him when she'd finished. It said:

Mr. Gadsby, I understand? You don't know me, but your younger brother Jimmy does — considerably so. I would like to speak to you in private, at your home, after you have taken the young lady home. You better find time to see me or it'll be just too bad.

It was unsigned, of course.

He creased his face disappointedly. "Not much in that. The mere fact that he received the note and tucked it in his shoe doesn't prove she actually did show up here."

"She was here, you can count on that," she let him know with a confident nod of her head.

"How do you know?"

"Anyone that would compose such a defiant note and have it smuggled into the hand of a prominent, well-to-do man whom she didn't even know, under the very nose of the girl he was engaged to marry, wouldn't let herself be stopped from calling around to see him, once she'd made up her mind to do it!"

"That still doesn't prove she shot him. I still think it was Holmes; he had twelve thousand five hundred dollars to cover up."

"Well, we've got to know, or that'll make it *you* — and neither one of them! We have about sixty-five minutes left. You take Holmes, and I'll take her. It's a toss-up between them."

"But you don't even know her name, or where to find her."

"We know where she works, and we know she's a tall redhead. They can't *all* be tall redheads down at the La Conga Club!"

"The place'll be closing by now."

"The people that can be really helpful will still be around — waiters, scrubwomen, washroom attendant. I'll trace her from there if I have to go over the hairbrushes in the dressing-room one by one for stray red hairs!"

"I thought you said we should stick together in this?"

She was already out at the head of

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the darkened stairs. "There isn't time any more! Here's how it is. We have these two possibilities, a man and a woman who both came here tonight — at separate times. One of them's innocent, one of them killed him. The thing is which? We haven't time for the trial-and-error system; we can't follow them up one at a time. We only have an hour. One of us is sure to be on a wild-goose chase, but the other one won't be. You take the man. I'll take the woman. If he turns out to be the guilty one, you've got to find some way of getting him back here with you, to face the music. If she does, then I'll have to."

"An unarmed girl like you, with just your bare hands? You don't know what you're likely to come up against!"

"We haven't any time to be afraid, we'll simply have to use our wits. We'll have to fit the method to the circumstances. We'll meet back here no later than a quarter to six. We'll have to, if we want to make that six o'clock bus."

As they parted in the darkness just inside the front door, to slip out into the street one at a time, the last thing she said, in a pleading whisper, was: "Frank, if you should get back first, before I do — wait for me, don't leave. I want to go home tonight!"

The hotel, when she had finally located it, had every earmark of one of those shady places catering to card-sharps, confidence men, and other fly-by-nights. It held no terrors for her, though; she had met its type of denizen on the dance floor nearly every night, for years past. She went up to the desk with the assurance of one who doesn't expect to be turned away, asked jauntily: "What room is Rose in? You know, Rose Beacon?"

The drink-sodden clerk regarded her doubtfully. "Is she expecting you?" He made a move toward the decrepit switchboard.

She flung the back of her hand at him familiarly. "Never mind the company manners. She only just left me a little while ago. I dropped by to tell her something I forgot to tell her. What's the matter, is it a Government secret?"

He grinned, relaxed. "Four-o-nine, sugar."

A Cleveland-Administration elevator took her up four floors. The sleepy elevator boy wanted to wait, evidently to see if she was admitted or not at this ungodly hour.

"That's all right," she assured him breezily as she stepped off the car, "I'll be there quite some time."

That didn't alter the circumstances any, but power of suggestion is a great thing. Just because she had said so, he closed the door and took the car down again. She didn't feel breezy as she walked along the dusty, poorly lighted corridor. Her thoughts were churning while her feet carried her toward the imminent showdown.

"How am I going to get in? Even if

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I do, how am I going to find out if she did it? Even if I do, how am I going to get her back there, all the way up to East Seventieth Street, without causing a big commotion, dragging the police into it, involving Frank worse than he is already, getting the two of us held on suspicion for days and weeks on end?"

She didn't know any of those things. She only knew she was going ahead. She could only pray, and act on instinct alone when the right time came. The door numbers were stepping up on her — 407, 408, 409. This was it, facing the corridor at right angles, forming a dead end. It looked so harmless, so impersonal — and yet behind it lurked her whole future destiny.

Suddenly, just as she came to a stop, a voice spoke on the other side of it. A woman's voice. So close it almost seemed to be addressing her. But wasn't, of course. "He says my girl friend's on her way up." The clerk must have phoned up, anyway, after she'd left the desk. "There's no friends of mine in town. I ain't even told nobody where I'm stopping. I'm gonna see what this is —"

The door swept open before Carol had time to do anything, or even to think what to do, and they stood looking at each other eye to eye. She got a snapshot of a hard, enameled face, a breath of alcohol on its lips, hostile wariness in its eyes. The wariness became a challenge.

"Wait a minute, who are *you*? Did you tell them you know me, downstairs? What's the angle? I never saw you before in my life —"

She must have taken a puff of a cigarette just before she opened the door, and had been holding it until now. Smoke suddenly appeared in two malevolent columns. She looked like Satan. She looked like someone it was good to stay away from.

Carol only knew she had to get in, even if it meant her own destruction. She knew she didn't have a chance. She knew this woman wasn't even alone in there; she'd just overheard her talking to someone as she neared the door. A crushing sense of failure, of having bungled everything, came over her. But she had to get in.

"We don't know each other personally," she said, borrowing her husky dance-hall voice, "but we've got a friend in common, so that makes it even. I'm talking about Mr. Stephen Gadsby."

A flash of consternation came over the Beacon woman's face. But she might have reacted that same way, Carol realized, even if she'd just been up there trying to blackmail him and then walked out again, without anything else.

Until now, on a strip of wall visible just behind her, there had been a vague shadow discernible. It now moved very subtly, slipped off, disappeared — as though whatever was causing it had withdrawn, was secreting itself.

The woman's eyes flicked briefly in that offside direction, came back again, as though she had just received

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some signal. She said tautly, and with an undertone of menace: "Suppose you come in a minute and let's hear what's on your mind." She widened the door. It wasn't done hospitably, but commandingly, as though: Either come in yourself or I'll reach out and haul you in.

Carol Warren thought: "Here I go. Hope I get out of here alive."

She walked slowly in and turned right into a tawdry, smoke-stenched room. Behind her the door champed back into its frame with an air of ominous finality; a key ticked off once against the lock, a second time as it was extracted from the keyhole.

A battle had begun, in which her only weapons were her wits, her nerve, and the feminine intuition. She knew that every veiled glance she cast around her, every slightest move she made, must be made to count, because there would be no quarter given, no second chance.

The room was empty, apparently. A door, presumably to a bath, was already firmly closed when her eyes first found it, but the knob had just stopped turning. If it appeared that she didn't know too much, the door would stay that way, wouldn't open again. But if she turned out to know too much — therein lay her cue — how to find out just what there was to know here, and what too much of it was. That door would tell her.

For the rest, drawers in the shabby bureau were out at narrow, uneven lengths, as though they had recently been emptied. A Gladstone bag stood on the floor at the foot of the bed. The bag was full, ready for removal. A number of objects were strewn about on top of the bureau, as though one or both of the occupants had returned in some turmoil, flung them down on entering. There were a woman's handbag, a pair of gloves, a crumpled handkerchief. The handbag had been left yawning open, as though the agitated hand that had plunged into it in search of something had been too nervous to close it again.

The Beacon woman sidled in after her, surreptitiously ground something out under her toe, then a moment later, as she turned to face Carol, was holding a half-consumed cigarette in her hand again. Carol pretended she hadn't noticed it smoking away on the edge of the table — the way a man will often leave a cigarette. It really was superfluous. That movement of the doorknob just now had been enough to tell her all she needed to know.

The woman drew out a chair, so that its back was to the closed door. "Help yourself to a seat." Even if Carol had wanted to sit somewhere else, the Beacon woman made it the only one available by taking the other one herself. She lowered herself into it as though she were on coiled springs ready to be released at any moment. "What'd you say your name was?"

"I didn't say, but you can put me down for Carol Miller."

"So you know a guy named Gadsby, do you? Tell me, sister, you been over to see him lately?"

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Carol said with crafty negligence, "Yeah, I just came from there now."

The Beacon woman was tautening up — inwardly. You could tell it on the outside quite easily, though. Her eyes strayed to some point over and beyond Carol's shoulder, as if in desperate search of further guidance. Carol carefully avoided following them with her own.

"How'd you find him?"

"Dead," said Carol quietly.

The Beacon woman didn't show the right type of surprise; it was surprise, all right, but it was a malevolent surprise, not a startled one. She didn't answer right away. She evidently wanted to "confer" with the recent shadow on the wall. Or it did with her. A brief spurt of water from a faucet behind the closed door, turned on, then off again, was the signal to this effect.

"'Scuse me a sec," she said, getting up. "I musta forgotten to tighten the tap in there."

She slipped in without opening the door very widely. She closed it quickly, so the visitor couldn't look in.

She had given Carol the chance herself. The chance to find whatever there was to find, if there was anything. It was only good for 30 seconds. And it wouldn't come again. She only had time to go for one thing. She decided on the open handbag on the dresser. It was the obvious place: the bureau drawers were presumably empty by now and the Gladstone bag was probably locked.

She darted across the intervening space and put her hand in. Outright evidence she knew she couldn't expect. That would be asking too much. But something — anything. And there was nothing. Lipstick, powder, the usual junk. Paper crackled against her probing fingers from one of the side pockets. She drew it hastily out, opened, scanned it. An unpaid hotel bill for $17.89. A man would have left it there. It had no connection with what she was here for.

Some inexplicable instinct cried out to her: "Hang onto it. It might come in handy." She flung herself back into her original seat again, did something to one of her stockings, and the hotel bill was gone.

An instant later the door reopened and the Beacon woman came out again. She sat down and fixed Carol with her eyes, evidently to keep her attention from wandering. "What'd you do, go there to Gadsby's alone?"

Carol gave her a knowing look. "Sure, you don't suppose I brought my grandmother, do you?"

"Well, uh, was there a big mob, lots of cops and excitement, that how you knew he was dead?"

Carol was answering these questions on instinct alone. Until they came out, she didn't know herself how they were going to come. It was like walking a tightrope — without a balancing pole and with no net under you.

"No, no one knew it yet. I was the first one found him, I guess. See, I had a key to the house. I went in and

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all the lights were out. I thought maybe he hadn't got home yet, so I'd wait for him. I went up, and there he was, plugged."

Rose Beacon moistened her lips. "So then I suppose you beat it out and hollered blue murder?"

"I beat it out, all right, but I didn't tell a soul. Think I wanted to get mixed up in it? I put the lights out, locked the door, and left the place just the way it was."

She had a slight sense of motion behind her. The air may have stirred a little — or something creaked. There was no time to turn her head. She just had time to think: "The door has opened behind me! That shows they did it. I've hit the right spot. My trail is the hot one, Frank's, the cold."

But that wasn't going to do her any good now.

Rose Beacon had just asked her one more question; a question she really no longer needed to have answered. "Where does your coming here tie into it?"

There was no need for her to worry about the answer; it wasn't expected of her. Something thick and ruffling whipped around her face from behind — a Turkish towel folded into a bandage, although she couldn't recognize what it was for an instant. She reared up, and one hand was seized by the wrist, drawn behind her. The Beacon woman jumped in, secured the other. The hands were brought together, tied cruelly with long, knotted strips of something.

She couldn't breathe for a moment, the towel covered her whole face. The horrible thought that she was to be smothered to death then and there occurred to her — but she realized dimly they wouldn't have tied her hands if that had been their purpose. A rough hand fumbled with the towel, lowered it a little, freeing her eyes and nostrils, tied it tightly at the back of her head.

The Beacon woman was still in front of her, talking to someone unseen behind her. "Keep it quiet now, you can hear everything through these walls." She went over to the phone.

A man's voice growled from across Carol's shoulder: "Be careful what you're doing."

"I just want to find out what we're up against. She may be some kind of a stooge, for all we know." She picked up the phone. "Hello, desk? Tell the party that came with my girl friend he don't need to wait any more. She's staying up here a while. You'll probably find him hanging around outside on the sidewalk." She waited, then spoke again. "No one out there, eh? Well, he probably got tired waiting and left."

She hung up, turned with a leer to the unseen man. "It's okay, Joe. She came here alone, the little fool!"

The man's voice said: "Get her feet — them high heels are barking my shins."

The Beacon woman brought out additional lengths of toweling knotted in strips — he'd evidently prepared

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them while he was confined in the bath — knelt down, whipped them dexterously in and around Carol's ankles. Carol became a helpless sheaf, tied at both ends.

"What's the play now?" Rose asked.

Her accomplice said: "Don't you figure we ought to —" He didn't finish it. Carol's blood ran cold. He said it as calmly as though they were talking about closing a window or putting out a light.

The Beacon woman answered ruefully: "That's begging for it, Joe. They're gonna know we were in this room." She got a sudden inspiration. "Hey, how about the window? Four floors ought to be enough. The three of us get drinking, see, and she has a little acci —"

"No good. We gotta move fast. We'd get hooked here for hours, answering all kinds of police questions. We don't wanta make their acquaintance that familiarly."

Rose Beacon raked a distracted hand through her hair. "Why the hell did you have to give him the one-two, anyway? I only went down to the front door and let you in so you could throw a scare into him, get him to pay off, because he was getting too much for me to handle alone. And then you sign off on him!"

"I couldn't help it. I only pointed it at him to keep him from calling the police like he was threatening to. He grabbed at it. You saw what happened. What should I do, let him take it away from me? What's the good of talking about it now? The damage is done. It's this twist we gotta think about now."

He moved out from behind Carol for the first time, crossed the room, flung open a closet door. She got her first look at him. He looked like the kind of sewer rat who would frame up a gin marriage between his partner in crime and a wealthy young scion, in hopes of collecting blackmail for years afterwards.

"All right," he was saying, "we'll truss her up in here. At least we'll get a head-start. And if she chirps and we get hauled in, they got nothing on us. We can always say she did it —"

They dragged her into the closet like a sack of potatoes. There was a clothes bar running across it at shoulder height. They tied a sort of halter under her arms, of thick sheet and pillow-case strips, wound it around the bar, and left her dangling with her bound feet just inches short of the floor.

"That way she won't be able to thump them and attract anyone's attention."

They closed the door on her. A sudden pall of darkness obliterated everything. She could still hear them for a moment or two more, making their last-minute preparations for departure.

"Got the bag?"

"Hey, I'm missing that hotel bill. We gotta pay up before we can get out of here. It musta fallen on the floor some place around here —"

"Never mind looking for it now;

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let it go. They can make out a new one for us at the desk —"

"What'll we say about her? They seen her come up here."

"All right, she got tanked and we left her here to sleep it off. Hang up a *Don't Disturb* on the door. That'll keep 'em out even longer —"

The outside door closed and they were gone.

She dangled there in the dark, unable even to swing her feet back and strike the rear wall of the closet. They'd never make that bus now. Poor Frank would wait for her at the Gadsby house, with the dead man to keep him company, until broad daylight came and someone happened on him there, and they'd arrest him for it. And that would be the end; he'd never be able to clear himself.

After all, Rose and her partner hadn't left anything half as incriminating over there as that broken-into wall safe Frank was responsible for. She could accuse them all she wanted to afterwards, when she was released herself, but it wouldn't do much good.

Precious minutes ticking by. It must be all of 5:30 by now. In another ten minutes at the latest she and Frank should have been starting for the bus terminal. A fat chance now! She'd be here all day probably.

They might have known the city would outsmart them. It always did. Just a small-town boy and a small-town girl — what chance did they have? He'd go up the river to the electric chair. And she'd turn into a tough chain-dancer in a treadmill, without a heart, without a soul, without even a dream any more. Precious minutes ticking by, that couldn't be stopped, couldn't be called back again . . .

The outside door suddenly opened furtively and someone came in again. For a minute wild hopes flashed through her mind. The hotel clerk, his suspicions aroused? Maybe even Frank himself, who had had time to find out by now that Holmes wasn't the guilty party — Then a voice spoke guardedly, and her hopes were dashed, turned into freezing horror.

"I shoulda thought of that sooner, before we got all the way downstairs." It was Rose Beacon's voice. They'd come back again — maybe to finish her off right on the spot. "There musta been something there that tipped her off. It's a cinch she didn't pull my name and address out of a hat —"

The closet door swung out and blinding light spilled over her, making her eyes useless for a moment. She was aware of herself being lowered from the clothes bar, dragged out into the room between the two of them. One of them lowered the towel gag sufficiently so that she could speak. She glimpsed Rose's hand poised threateningly toward her lips, fingers knotted.

"Now if you try to scream, I'll let you have one!"

She couldn't have, even if she'd wanted to. All she could do was pant and sag exhaustedly against the man

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who was holding her, overcome by the excruciating strain of the position she'd been in.

"Now quick, no stalling," Rose went on. "What was it over there at Gadsby's place that tipped you off I knew him? How'd you know where to find me?"

Carol answered in a muffled but unhesitant voice: "You dropped a hotel bill out of your handbag to the floor. It was lying near him —"

"She's lying! I could swear I saw it when I got back here —"

"No," Carol panted. "It was over there; seventeen dollars and eighty-nine cents."

"Did you bring it with you?" the man asked, giving her a merciless shake.

"No. I left it lying there right where it was."

"Don't take her word for it, search her handbag," he ordered. "If she picked it up in here, she's still got it on her."

The woman did, quickly and thoroughly. "She hasn't got it."

"Then we'll have to go back there and get it! We can't leave it lying around, it's as good as a visiting card." This time it was toward Rose he backed his hand. "You dopey idiot! Why weren't you more careful?"

"I took it out to show it to him for a build-up, to show him how I needed money; that was before he got tough about it. It's better this way, don't you get it, Joe? We'll take her with us when we go back, and then we'll" — she hitched her head at Carol with unmistakable meaning —"do it there. Fix it to look like she did it to him, and then bumped herself off. That way we're in the clear."

"How'll we get her past the desk?"

"She's pie-eyed, that's what we told him just now when we came down without her, ain't it? We're helping her home. Leave her hands tied the way they are, just loosen her feet." She took off her own coat, slung it loosely around Carol's shoulders, covering the unnatural rigidity of her arms.

The man brought out something from one of his pockets, slipped a hand underneath the enshrouding coat, ground something round and hard into her spine. "If you let out a peep, this goes off into you. And don't think I'm kidding!"

She knew he wasn't. But the point was, why should she cry out on her way through the lobby below or outside the street, when she was getting them to do just what she'd wanted them to from the beginning — go back to the murder house and face their crime? The only difference was, now they had the upper hand, and it would probably end in her own death.

"Keep your head down," Rose Beacon cautioned viciously, and got a grip at the back of her neck. She made it look as though she was supporting her. In place of the towel gag she solicitously held a handkerchief pressed to Carol's mouth with her other hand, as though Carol were on the verge of being ill.

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They swayed out through the lobby with her. "She'll be all right as soon as we get some black coffee into her," Rose called out cheerfully to the clerk. He snickered understandingly.

They evidently had a car of their own. They maneuvered her down the street to where it had been waiting in readiness for their own getaway and squeezed her into the front seat between the two of them. Rose took over the gun, kept it prodded into her side. Joe took the wheel. She sat there docilely, made no move to resist.

They braked two or three doors down from the house, in the before-dawn desolation of the street. Joe cut the ignition, watchfully scanned the dark, lifeless face of the house for a minute before making a move to get out.

"Still good for another quick trip in and out," he commented finally.

Her heart was pounding wildly as they hauled her out to the sidewalk, led her over to the house with quick looks around to make sure no one was in sight, and hustled her up the stoop into the concealment of the vestibule.

"Made it," Rose breathed.

He tried the door cautiously and it fell back.

"I must have left it that way when I scooted out," Carol said quickly.

Did that mean Frank had got back yet? But if he had, there was no light showing to indicate it. Maybe it had actually been that way ever since she and Frank had left the last time. Or maybe someone else had found his way in.

They thrust her inside. She'd played the game through to the end. And this was the end, now. Once they closed this door on her, every second was going to count. If Frank came back even five minutes from now, it would be too late! He'd find her there — like Gadsby was. And if he came back now, it would only mean the two of them, instead of just one. The man and the Beacon woman were armed and he wasn't.

The darkness inside the house was as impenetrable as ever. Rose said the same thing she herself had the time before.

"Don't light the lights until we get up there."

He lit a match instead and dwarfed it in the depths of his two hands to an orange-red pinpoint. He led the way with it. Carol came at his heels, her hands still bound, coat still loose around her shoulders, prodded on by the gun. The Beacon woman came last. The silence around them was overpowering.

Suppose Frank had been waiting up there in the room, with the lights out? Suppose he heard them, came forward now, saying, "Carol, is that you?" She would be bringing death on him. And if he wasn't up there, then she had brought death on herself. But of the two choices, she preferred the latter. What was the difference either way? It was too late now; they'd missed the bus. The city was the real victor.

The opening to the death room loomed black and empty before them

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in the tiny rays of the match. He whipped it out and for a moment there was nothing. Then he lit the room lights and they shoved her in with the dead man. Into the emptiness where there was no Frank to offer help.

Joe said: "All right, now hurry up and get it. Let's do what we have to and get out of here fast!"

Rose scanned the floor, turned on Carol menacingly. "Well, where is it? I don't — where'd you find it?" She was still holding the gun in her hand.

The man said, with the calm voice of murder: "All right, give it to me. I'll use it. No one heard it the first time; no one'll hear it this time, either." He raised the gun, steadied it on her.

It took a second or two, but her thoughts took hours. Frank wasn't here. He wasn't in the house. He hadn't got back yet. She was going to die now. Maybe that was better. It was too late now to take that bus — the bus for home. The clock said —

That was the last thing she saw. She closed her eyes as she turned back to face death. Gadsby was lying over to her left. Joe was standing midway between her and the unlighted bedroom door, with his back to it. Rose was crouched somewhere behind her, still in quest of the hotel bill, looking under tables and behind chairs. She closed her eyes and waited.

The roar of the gun, when it came, was louder than she'd thought it would be. The pain was less — there wasn't any. Her eyelids sprang open, and the gun, still tracing a smoky line through the air, was zigzagging crazily upward in Joe's hand. Another hand had his clamped by the wrist and was hoisting it from behind. And the crook of an arm was wrapped around his neck, elbow pointing toward her.

Joe's face was contorted, suffused with red, in the throes of the struggle. And another face behind his, glimpsed briefly over his shoulder, was equally contorted, equally blood-darkened. But not too much so as not to be recognizable. The boy next door, fighting for the two of them — the way the boy next door should.

Rose flashed by her from the rear, an andiron she'd snatched from before the fireplace upraised above her head. But a small-town girl can be as quick as a city girl. Her hands were tied; she couldn't reach out and grab her. She slithered one leg out until it was almost calf-low to the floor and deftly spoked it between the two scampering feet.

Rose went down face-first in a rocking-horse fall, and the andiron went looping harmlessly through the air. Carol flung herself down across her, knelt on her with both knees at once, pinning her flat. Every time Rose tried to squirm free and throw her off, Carol brought up one knee and slammed it down again with redoubled force.

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Meanwhile the two men had toppled over to the floor. Joe was on top, but facing the wrong way. Frank still had the half-nelson around his neck from underneath, was still choking off the gun-hand at the wrist. They suddenly rolled over; Joe was now face-down to the floor. Frank let go the half-nelson, drew back that arm, shot it forward again against the side of his head. He had to do it a second time, and then he stood up and brought the gun up with him.

"I'll be right with you, Carol," he said. He stood watchfully over Joe for a second with the gun. Joe twitched a little, raised a dazed hand to the side of his head, but stayed flat.

Frank picked up something from Gadsby's desk, came around behind her, and sawed her hands free. Both of them were still breathing too fast to talk much.

"I saw them bringing you in, from one of the front windows on this floor. Something about the way you were walking told me they had a gun on you. I backed up into the bedroom and laid low —"

She wasn't wasting any time, she was already taking her own severed bonds, reknitting them, and fastening Rose's wrists with them, numb as her own hands still were.

"Do that to him, too," she suggested.

He came back with sheets and pillow cases from the bedroom and went to work. "I'd only gotten back a minute before, myself," he told her. "Holmes didn't do it. He *was* here earlier tonight and he was in hot water about that check, just like we figured; but I could tell by the way he acted he'd left Gadsby still alive. He nearly went crazy with fear when I told him Gadsby was dead; he thought Gadsby still had his bad check and he'd be accused of it —" He stood up, surveyed their handiwork. "No need to gag them; we want them to attract attention. In fact, we'll do it for them."

"Well, there they are," she agreed, "but it's too late to do us any good now." She pointed. "Two past 6."

"Let's try for it, anyway. It *will* be too late if we just stand here —" He caught her by the hand, pulled her out after him. "I'll use the downstairs phone; it's nearer to the door." He waited until she'd retrieved the valise she'd stood against the wall the first time they came in, opened the front door, and poised herself for flight out in the vestibule.

"Ready?" he called. He picked up the phone. "Hello, gimme the police. You'll find Stephen Gadsby murdered on the second floor of his house." He gave the number on East 70th Street. "It was done by the two people that you'll find tied up in the room with him. Oh — and you'll find the gun they used under the doormat in the vestibule. No, this isn't a rib. Never mind who I am —" He flung the instrument away from him without even bothering to rehook it. "Go!" he shouted to her.

She went flying out through the glassed doors, scampering down the

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stoop, made for their captives' car, and jumped in that. He came dashing out after her a moment later, slammed the car door after him, and swerved it out into the middle of the road. They'd hardly rounded the corner then they could hear the keen of the approaching cruise-car coming up from the other direction. They went tearing down Madison Avenue, almost empty of traffic at that hour.

"We'll never make it, Frank," she shouted above the hiss of wind.

The buildings kept shooting up taller ahead of them all the time. The sky kept getting lighter in the east. At 59th he shot across town to Seventh, took that the rest of the way down to the Thirties. Broadway came racing diagonally across their path; a big tower-cube suddenly loomed into the light-blue sky. She grabbed his arm so unexpectedly the car swerved crazily for a minute.

"Frank, look! The clock on the Paramount says only five to six! That one in the room back there must have been fast."

Another razor-edged turn that lifted the two outside wheels clear, and they were on Thirty-fourth. And there it was, under way already, the bus they were supposed to have taken. It must have just cleared the terminal ramp as they got there, was only now beginning to pick up speed, heading for the river tunnel — and home.

He sent the car winging after it. They overtook it just as it reached Tenth and slowed to make its turn. He made a wider, outside turn, cut in ahead lengthwise, and came to a shuddering stop that effectively blocked the bus.

Its brakes screamed. The driver swore at them — in pantomime and also with his horn. They jumped out, ran back to it, pounded on the glass inset of the door. "Glen Falls? Let us in, let us in! We're going your way! Don't leave us behind —"

Anyone with a heart would have taken them on. The driver grudgingly pulled the control lever and the door swung open. She went reeling down the aisle, found a vacant double seat near the back. A moment later Frank had dropped down beside her, their barricading car removed from the right of way and their fares paid. The bus started again.

When she'd got her breath back, she said in an undertone: "I wonder if we'll be able to make what we did stick? Do you think those two back there will be able to wiggle out of it? There wasn't very much motive for the police to see —"

"There is now — back there in Stephen Gadsby's inside coat pocket, where I put it, so they'd be sure to find it first thing. A six-page confessional letter from the younger brother, Jimmy, was delivered at the house special delivery while I was waiting for you, right after I got back myself. It scared hell out of me, but finally, to get rid of the messenger, I rolled up my sleeve and stuck my arm outside the door and signed for it, as though I'd been roused out of bed by his ring.

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"I just had time to read it before those two showed up with you. The kid brother made a clean breast of everything, in it, hoping to forewarn the elder Gadsby not to come across if the Beacon woman tried to put her hooks in him — as he was afraid she was going to. He'd been hooked into a gin marriage by her; she was an entertainer at a roadhouse near his college. It wasn't even a real gin marriage, it was spiked.

"She'd called in this former vaudeville partner of hers and he'd impersonated the justice of the peace at the mock ceremony. They bled the kid for all they could, until Stephen Gadsby cut off his funds.

"They saw the game was up, so they lit out fast. They figured their dodge might be good for one more 'painless extraction' at this end, before Jimmy could warn his brother. Rose Beacon was probably well provided with the usual torchy letters, and must have threatened to drag the whole family into the papers if they didn't buy her off."

"I know; I heard her discuss that part of it with her partner. She saw she wasn't getting anywhere with him, so she jumped down to the door and let her accomplice into the house, thinking that would cow him. Instead, it put them in a murder. Gadsby made a threatening move toward the phone, to call in the cops. The partner lost his head and broke out with a gun. Gadsby grabbed at it. The partner fired."

After a while he took something out of his pocket, showed it to her. Her face paled at the sight of so much money. For a minute she thought —

"No, don't be frightened," he reassured her. "It's honest this time, it was given to me. I had that bad check of Holmes's with me when I went over there to see him, you know. He hadn't meant to do it. He'd just been caught short, and he'd raised the money to cover it even by the time he went over to see Gadsby last night. Only he couldn't square it because Gadsby couldn't find the check at the time. It had dropped out of the cash box when I broke into the safe the first time.

"Anyway, I let him have the check back; it would only have gotten him mixed up in the murder if it turned up afterwards — and it was easy to see he hadn't been guilty of that. He made out a new one right under my eyes and mailed it back to Gadsby; the estate can cash it, of course. And he was so grateful and relieved at getting out of the mess, he made me a present of two hundred cash. For us to get a new start on."

She wasn't listening any more. Her head dropped to his shoulder, rocked there gently in rhythm with the motion of the bus. Her eyes drooped blissfully. "We're going home," she thought drowsily. "Me and the boy next door, we're going home . . ."

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edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

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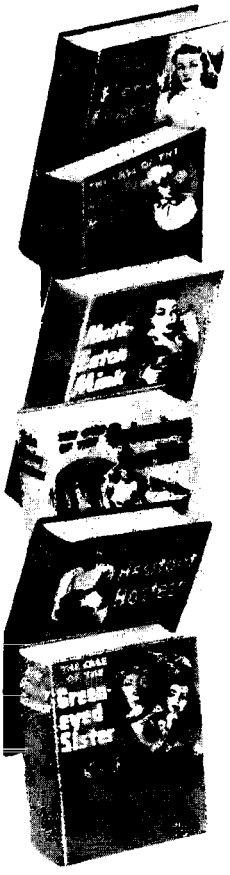

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